

# A Generation Without Smacking:

The impact of Sweden's ban on physical punishment

JOAN E DURRANT



**Save the Children**

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This report was written by Joan E Durrant  
PhD c Psych  
Department of Family Studies  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada  
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## Preface

Save the Children is publishing this research study as a contribution to the current public debate on the physical punishment of children. The study presents new and important information on the impact of the Swedish legislation banning physical punishment, which was introduced in 1979. Save the Children hopes that this study will contribute to an informed discussion on the merits of introducing similar legislation in the UK and other countries around the world.

Save the Children is a member of the Children Are Unbeatable alliance of over 250 organisations in the UK. The alliance is seeking legal reform in the UK to give children the same protection as adults under the law on assault, as well as encouraging the promotion of positive, non-violent discipline.

## Acknowledgements

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## About the author

Joan E. Durrant received her PhD in Child-Clinical Psychology from the University of Windsor, Canada, in 1988 and her Professional Registration in 1991. She obtained her clinical training at St Thomas Psychiatric Hospital, Windsor Western Regional Children's Centre, and Chedoke-McMaster Child and Family Centre, where she worked with children with behaviour disorders and their families. She has held teaching and research positions at the University of Guelph and Brock University. She is currently an Associate Professor of Family Studies at the University of Manitoba, where she teaches courses in research methods, child development, assessment, and intervention. She is the past Director of the Child Development Centre at the University of Manitoba.

For the last decade, Dr Durrant's research has focused on the psychological and cultural factors that contribute to parental use of corporal punishment. She has published articles and contributed to books in this field, and has presented her research at numerous scientific conferences. Her research has been supported by the Canadian Departments of Health and Justice.

Dr Durrant is a Member of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development, the Society for Research in Child Development, and the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

## Executive summary

On 1 July 1979 Sweden became the first country to explicitly abolish all forms of corporal punishment of children by all carers, including parents. The aims of the ban were to change public attitudes toward corporal punishment; establish a clear framework for parent education and support, and facilitate earlier and less intrusive intervention when child protection is required.

The ban was intended to be educational rather than punitive. Accompanying and ongoing supportive measures are intended to encourage parents to seek assistance with child management difficulties and to learn about alternative methods of discipline, thereby reducing reliance on and support for physical force.

Public support for corporal punishment has declined markedly in Sweden over the last 30 years. Whereas in 1965 53 per cent of Swedes were supportive of corporal punishment, today only 11 per cent support its use – even in its mildest forms. This decline is most dramatic among the younger generation of today's parents; only 6 per cent of Swedes under the age of 35 currently support the use of corporal punishment.

Practice, as well as attitude, has changed. A 1994 survey of middle-school pupils (13- to 15-year-olds, whose early childhood occurred shortly after the ban) showed only 3 per cent reporting harsh slaps from parents, and only 1 per cent said they had been hit with implements.

No Swedish child died as a result of physical abuse in the 1980s. Four have been killed since – between 1990 and 1996 – but only one at the hands of a parent.

Since 1981, reports of assaults against children in Sweden have increased – as they have worldwide, following the 'discovery' of child abuse. However, the proportion of suspects prosecuted who are in their twenties, and therefore raised in a no-smacking culture, has decreased since 1984, as has the proportion who were born in the Nordic nations with corporal punishment bans.

The vast majority of reported assaults are for petty or common offences, suggesting that the majority of children are being identified before serious injury occurs. The proportion of reported assaults that are legally pursued without trial has remained steady, while the prosecution rate has shown a declining trend. Therefore there has been no increase of parents being drawn into the criminal justice system for minor assaults.

Nor has there been an increase of children being removed from parents through the intervention of

social workers. Quite the reverse: the number of children coming into care has decreased by 26 per cent since 1982 (and of children in care, an increasing proportion are short-term placements). There has also been a decrease in compulsory measures of social work intervention – in 1995, fewer than 20 per cent of measures were implemented without parental consent. In-home family support measures with parental consent have increased over this period.

It might be supposed that, without corporal punishment, children are being reared who lack discipline and self-control. However, overall rates of youth crime have remained steady since 1983. The proportion of individuals convicted of theft who are between the ages of 15 and 17 years declined by 21 per cent between 1975 and 1996. The proportion of suspects in narcotics crimes who are in this age group declined by 75 per cent between 1970 and 1996. Young people's drug intake, alcohol intake, and suicide rates have also declined.

In cases of assault against young children, the proportion of alleged perpetrators who were aged 15 to 19 showed a declining trend between 1984 and 1994. The statistics do show an increase among this age group of alleged assault against older children. However, close analysis indicates that this is largely attributable to increased enforcement, rather than to an increase in street or domestic violence.

The proportion of young people who consume alcohol has been decreasing steadily since 1971, as has the proportion of youth who have experimented with drugs. The proportion of young people who continue to use drugs is negligible. The rate of youth suicide also declined between 1970 and 1996.

While drawing a direct causal link between the corporal punishment ban and any of these social trends would be too simplistic, the evidence presented here indicates that the ban has not had negative effects. In terms of its original goals of modifying public attitudes toward corporal punishment and facilitating early identification and supportive intervention, it has certainly been successful.

# Introduction

## History of the Swedish corporal punishment ban

Sweden is notable in the Western world for becoming (in 1979) the first nation to abolish all kinds of corporal punishment of children by all carers. This law represents the end of a series of legislative reforms spanning 50 years which were aimed at making the rejection of corporal punishment increasingly explicit in law.

One hundred years ago corporal punishment was common in Sweden, and many children experienced its most severe forms (Sverne, 1993). However, concerns about children's welfare began to be expressed in the early 20th century (Durrant & Olsen, 1997), and in 1928 Sweden became one of the first countries to forbid corporal punishment in its secondary schools (gymnasiums) through an amendment to the Education Act.

Violence against children continued to occur in homes, however, and it was believed that the defence contained in the Penal Code for carers who used corporal punishment was contributing to this problem. This defence was repealed in 1957: children and adults now received the same degree of protection from assault, and the grounds for criminal prosecution of carers who physically harmed their children were clarified through this measure.

However, the Parents' Code (*Föräldrabalken*, a civil code governing family law) still contained a paragraph permitting parents to use corporal punishment, thereby allowing mild forms of physical punishment that would not constitute criminal assault. In 1966 this paragraph was removed from the Parents' Code, but corporal punishment was not explicitly prohibited.

At about the same time (1960), corporal punishment was abolished in child care institutions and reformatory schools. It was expected that Swedes would now understand that corporal punishment was no longer an acceptable practice. However, in 1975, a case of serious physical child abuse occurred and the father who had severely beaten his three-year-old child was acquitted by the court. Public outcry over this case, and over child abuse in general, contributed to a 1977 decision by the Minister of Justice to appoint a Commission on Children's Rights with the objective of reviewing and modifying the Parents' Code.

The Commission, chaired by Tor Sverne, a former judge and Parliamentary Ombudsman with experience in child welfare, concluded that the

guidelines for parents and legal authorities were not sufficiently clear with regard to assaults against children. The members of the Commission proposed unanimously to add a paragraph to the Parents' Code stating explicitly that corporal punishment was not permitted (SOU, 1978). The proposal was supported by 28 of the 30 experts who reviewed it; by all political parties, and by 98 per cent of Parliamentary members. The proposal was passed by Parliament in 1979 and put into force on 1 July of that year. (For additional information on the history and context of the Swedish corporal punishment ban, see Durrant, 1996; Durrant & Olsen, 1997; Newell, 1989; Ziegert, 1983, 1987).

The relevant paragraph in the Parents' Code reads:

Children are entitled to care, security and a good upbringing. Children are to be treated with respect for their person and individuality and may not be subjected to physical punishment or other injurious or humiliating treatment. (Chapter 6, Section 1)

While the law makes clear that the criminal law on assault applies equally to assaults of adults and children, it is important to note that the law was not intended as a means of criminalising carers; for this reason the law was written into the Parents' Code, which carries no criminal penalties, rather than the Penal Code. Its primary purpose was to educate, not to coerce:

Should physical chastisement meted out to a child cause bodily injury or pain which is more than of very temporary duration it is classified as assault and is an offence punishable under the Criminal Code. In theory, at least, this was also true before the new bill came into force, although it was not generally known. The advent of the new law swept aside all doubt, although trivial offences will remain unpunished, either because they cannot be classified as assault or because an action is not brought. (Ministry of Justice, 1979)

## Accompanying supportive measures

The Children's Rights Commission recommended, as part of its proposal, that a public education campaign be conducted to inform the Swedish public about the law and its objectives. In response, the Ministry of Justice carried out the most expensive pamphlet distribution yet conducted in Sweden (Ziegert, 1983). The 16-page colour pamphlet

contained information about the law and provided advice regarding alternative disciplinary strategies. Copies were distributed to all households with young children and were translated into all major immigrant languages. In addition, information about the law was printed on milk cartons for two months, in order to have information about the law present at mealtimes, when parents and children are together, so that families could discuss the issue. As a result of these measures, by 1981 99 per cent of Swedes knew about the law – a level of knowledge unmatched in any other study of knowledge about law in industrialised societies (Ziegert, 1983).

Support to parents is part of the fabric of Swedish society. For example, in 1979 parents were given the right to take time off work with pay to attend parenting classes for 10 hours before and 10 hours after a child's birth (Haas, 1996). Nursing staff at well-baby clinics, where virtually all children receive primary health care, provide information regarding child development and monitor families' exposure to social stress (see Durrant & Olsen, 1997 for more information on Swedish family policy and its relation to the corporal punishment ban; also Haas, 1996). Such supportive measures, together with the non-punitive nature of the corporal punishment ban, are intended to encourage parents to seek assistance with child management difficulties and to learn about alternative disciplinary methods, thereby reducing reliance on and support for physical force.

## Objectives of the Swedish corporal punishment ban

The ban had three primary objectives. First, it was intended to alter attitudes toward the use of physical force with children. It was expected that the law would produce a shift in social pressure such that a 'good' parent would be seen as one who does not use corporal punishment. This was viewed as the first step in eliminating corporal punishment from Swedish society.

Second, the ban was intended to set a clear guideline for parents and professionals, ending debates about 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' physical punishment. Nurses, social workers, teachers and other professionals could now state clearly to families that physical force was not permitted and could identify early in the cycle of abuse those parents who were at risk of harming their children. It was also now clear to the general public that the use of physical force with children was not permitted; it was expected that Swedes would act

promptly when witnessing assaults and when children disclosed experiences of physical harm.

Third, earlier identification was expected to result in earlier intervention. Professionals could now feel comfortable in recommending alternative disciplinary strategies, providing supportive and educational materials to families, and acting quickly when they identified families at risk. When even mild corporal punishment was being used, professionals could now provide information about alternatives without feeling that they were trespassing on a private family matter. It was intended that early intervention would have two outcomes:

- 1 decreasing rates of child maltreatment, and
- 2 implementation of more supportive and less coercive measures than would be used where intervention occurs only after a child has been harmed.

## The present study

The primary purpose of the present study was to evaluate whether the ban's objectives have been met; that is, to determine whether attitudes have shifted, early identification has increased, and intervention has become less intrusive. Trends in four relevant social variables were examined over time:

- public attitudes toward corporal punishment;
- reporting of assaults against children;
- estimates of child maltreatment rates, and
- measures taken by the social authorities.

A second purpose of the present study was to investigate the well-being of Swedish youth in the years preceding and following the ban in order to assess whether or not the ban has contributed to a decline in children's self-discipline or an increase in social unrest. To address this purpose, trends in youth crime, alcohol and drug use among youth, and teen suicide were examined.

### DATA COLLECTION

The research findings presented here are based on data collected through

- 1 interviews with a wide range of individuals, including attorneys, social workers, and researchers, and
- 2 primary data sources, including Statistics Sweden and the National Crime Prevention Council.

Methods of data collection are described in the Appendix (page 28).

## DATA ANALYSIS

To assess whether or not the goals of the ban have been met, data were obtained from the mid-1970s until 1997, to document trends from the period before the corporal punishment ban was passed until the present time. In some cases, the available data were more limited. A trend line was generated for each of the relevant variables, which identified the line of best fit across the years under study. All data show periodic fluctuations over time; a trend line indicates whether the data show an overall tendency in one direction by identifying the path that is least distant to all points. On the figures presented in the following sections the trend lines generated are labelled 'linear'.

In order to examine the well-being of Swedish young people since the ban's passage, trend lines were generated for youth involvement in crime, and for alcohol and drug use among youth. In addition, cohort analyses were conducted to compare the behaviour of young people raised following the ban's passage with that of youth raised prior to it. The mean proportions of total criminal convictions (theft, narcotics crimes and assault) committed by youth; the mean percentage of youth who used alcohol and drugs, and the mean youth suicide rate were compared across two five-year periods. The first period was 1975 to 1979; individuals who were 15 to 17 years of age during this period were raised to adolescence prior to the passage of the corporal punishment ban. The second period was 1992 to 1996. Individuals who were 15 to 17 years of age during this period were born between 1975 and 1981. As they were four years old or younger when the corporal punishment ban was passed, they were raised largely following its passage.

## FINDINGS

### Public Attitudes Toward Corporal Punishment

A primary aim of the Swedish corporal punishment ban was to alter attitudes toward the use of this method of punishment. It was expected that, through its symbolic function, the law would shape public values and set a standard of non-violence against children. By setting an unambiguous standard and providing public education regarding the law's rationale, legislators aimed to make corporal

punishment socially unacceptable. Such an attitudinal shift was considered an important step toward the elimination of its use.

### National polls

National opinion polls have been conducted intermittently in Sweden since the mid-1960s to chart trends in support for the practice of corporal punishment. These polls have been conducted by the Swedish Opinion Research Institute (Svenska Institutet för Opinionsundersökningar: SIFO) and Statistics Sweden (Statistiska Centralbyrån: SCB). Their findings are based on large, nationally-representative samples. As Figure 1 indicates, support for corporal punishment has declined markedly over the past 30 years. While in 1965, eight years after the repeal of the Criminal Code defence, half of the Swedish population believed that corporal punishment was necessary in childrearing, by 1981 that proportion had decreased by 50 per cent (SIFO, 1981). By 1994 the proportion of Swedes supportive of corporal punishment, even in its mildest forms, was only 11 per cent (SCB, 1996c).

This massive shift in public attitudes appears to reflect a generational effect. As Figure 1 demonstrates, the dramatic decline in support for corporal punishment occurred over a 30-year period. Further, among the current cohorts of adults, those who support corporal punishment are three times more likely to be over 54 years of age (18 per cent) than under 35 years of age (6 per cent) (SCB, 1996c). Clearly, approval of this method has declined in successive generations.

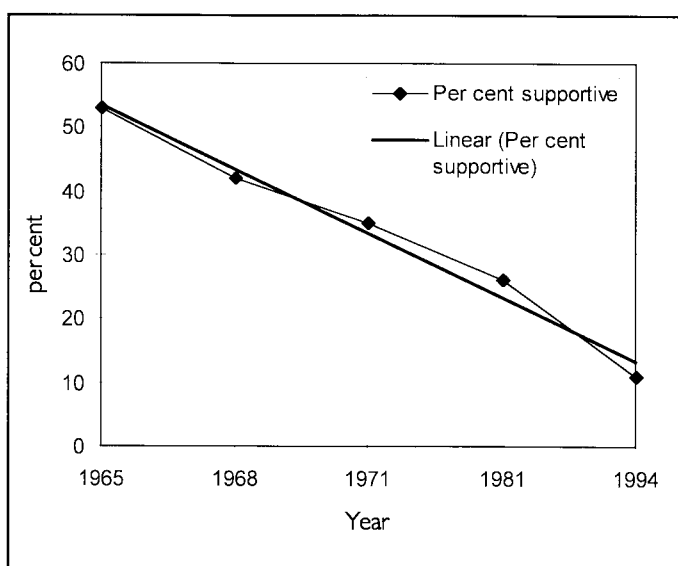


Figure 1: Percentage of the Swedish public supportive of corporal punishment

Current levels of support for corporal punishment are also related to gender and education. Those who still support its use are almost three times as likely to be men (16 per cent) as women (6 per cent), and more than four times as likely to have an elementary school (18 per cent) as a university level (4 per cent) of education. Despite these group differences, only a minority of any particular group is positively inclined toward the use of corporal punishment.

Among middle-school pupils (aged 13 to 15), support for corporal punishment is related to immigrant status. Those pupils who were born in Sweden or who immigrated to Sweden before 1985 are less likely to have positive attitudes (5 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively) than are those who were born in or immigrated to Sweden in 1985 or later (12.5 per cent). Therefore, 'the longer the pupil has lived in Sweden, the less he/she accepts physical punishment of children' (SCB, 1996c, page 9). However, even among children who immigrated to Sweden after 1990, support is relatively low (13 per cent).

## Interview studies

Only one other study has investigated Swedes' attitudes toward corporal punishment (Durrant, Rose-Krasnor, & Broberg, under review). In this study, a randomly-selected sample of Swedish mothers of pre-school children were interviewed about their attitudes toward spanking. It was found that a large majority of these mothers believe spanking is harmful to the child (81 per cent), ineffective in the long term (89 per cent) and unnecessary (81 per cent). 87 per cent stated that it is a bad disciplinary technique overall. Fewer than one-quarter (22 per cent) of these mothers believed that it is a parent's right to spank if it is viewed as necessary. Very few (5 per cent) stated that spanking is a normal part of their parenting.

## Estimates of the use of corporal punishment

As support for corporal punishment is a primary predictor of its use (Holden, Coleman, & Schmidt, 1995; Moore & Straus, 1987; Socolar & Stein, 1995), it might be expected that a shift in public attitudes would lead to a reduction in the use of corporal punishment. Although no longitudinal studies of use exist, findings of a series of cross-sectional studies indicate that corporal punishment has declined substantially in Sweden over the past 40 years.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Stattin et al. (1995) found that more than 90 per cent of mothers in their Swedish sample had struck their pre-school-aged children. However, by 1994, only half of adults (aged 18 and older) reported having received physical punishment as children from a mother or father, with the prevalence being approximately 8 per cent higher among older adults than among younger and middle-aged adults (SCB, 1996c). Moreover, only one-third of middle-school pupils (aged 13 to 15) reported having received physical punishment from a mother or father before they reached the teen years. Of those children who had received physical punishment, most had experienced only its mildest forms (for example, arm-grabbing, hair-pulling, and mild slaps). Of the children surveyed, only 3 per cent had received harsh slaps and 1 per cent had been hit with objects.

Another recent study (Durrant, Broberg, & Rose-Krasnor, in press) asked Swedish mothers of pre-school-aged children how they would respond to various child misbehaviours. Only 16 per cent of these mothers said that they would use physical force. Of those who suggested this method, none said that they would strike the child; rather, all said that they would grab or tightly hold the child.

Together, these findings suggest that the use of physical punishment has declined in Sweden and that its forms have become increasingly mild. Indeed, it appears that the very definition of mild physical punishment has come to exclude hard slaps (SCB, 1996c), which would be considered normative in many other countries.

## Summary

Support for physical punishment has decreased dramatically in Sweden over the past 30 years and this decline has been accompanied by a reduction in its use. The corporal punishment ban and ongoing public education campaigns appear to have been extremely effective in altering the social climate with regard to corporal punishment. While parental striking of children was a common occurrence 40 years ago, this practice has become increasingly rare over recent decades.

# Reporting of Assaults Against Children

Sweden has had a mandatory reporting law since 1924: professionals are required to report to the social services any suspected cases of child abuse, and private citizens are encouraged to do so. There is no requirement to report suspected child abuse to the police, although the police must report all suspected cases to the social services. Any reports made to the police must be recorded in the official statistics; the police have no discretionary power to not register reported crimes, no matter how minor.

## Reporting rates

One of the goals of the corporal punishment ban was to increase awareness of the physical abuse of children. It was intended to encourage the public to take seriously assaults against children and to act to protect children at risk. Together with the public awareness campaigns conducted in Sweden during the 1970s and 1980s, this legal change could be expected to produce an increase in child assault reports through the 1980s.

Reporting data are recorded by SCB and the National Crime Prevention Council (Brottsförebyggande rådet: BRÅ). Data are available on the rate of assaults against children reported to the police (crimes) between 1981 and 1996, as well as on the proportion of children who were allegedly assaulted (cases) between 1984 and 1995. These figures include not only alleged assaults by parents, but by all individuals including children.

As expected, rates of reported crimes and cases have increased (BRÅ, 1997; SCB, 1995a). However, it is important to note that even at its peak, the proportion of children under the age of 15 who were allegedly assaulted has not exceeded 2.8 per 1,000 population. As shown in Figure 2, the rate of reported crimes increased steadily between 1981 (0.6 per 1,000) and 1996 (3.1 per 1,000). (This trend appears to have levelled off between 1995 and 1996.) Similarly, the rate of reported cases increased between 1984 (0.7 per 1,000) and 1994 (2.8 per 1,000).

## Kinds of assaults reported

Assault is categorised in three levels in Sweden. Aggravated assaults are serious offences which warrant prison sentences of one to 10 years. Common assaults are of a moderate nature,

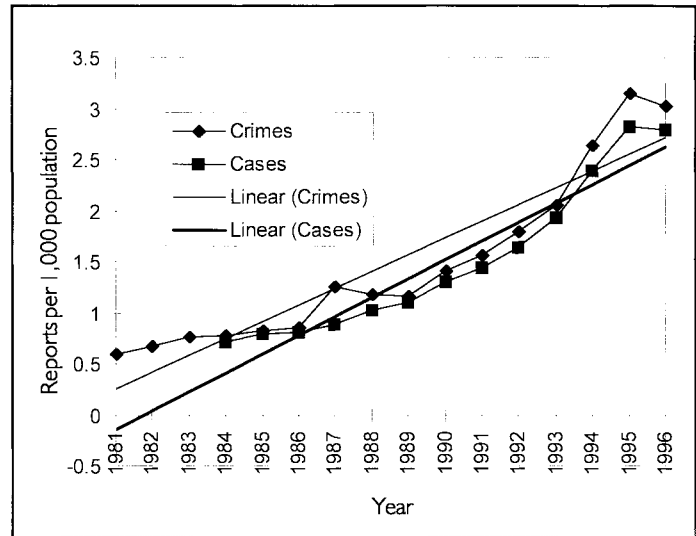


Figure 2: Reported assaults per 1,000 population, 0- to 14-year-old victims

carrying a maximum prison term of two years. Petty assaults constitute the mildest level and are punishable by fines.

Figure 3 demonstrates that the vast majority of reported assaults against children (averaging 92 per cent) are petty or common offences, suggesting that identification is occurring before serious injury is sustained. The relative proportions of reported aggravated and petty/common assaults did not change between 1981 and 1996, indicating that the seriousness of reported assaults has not increased (BRÅ, 1997; SCB, 1995a).

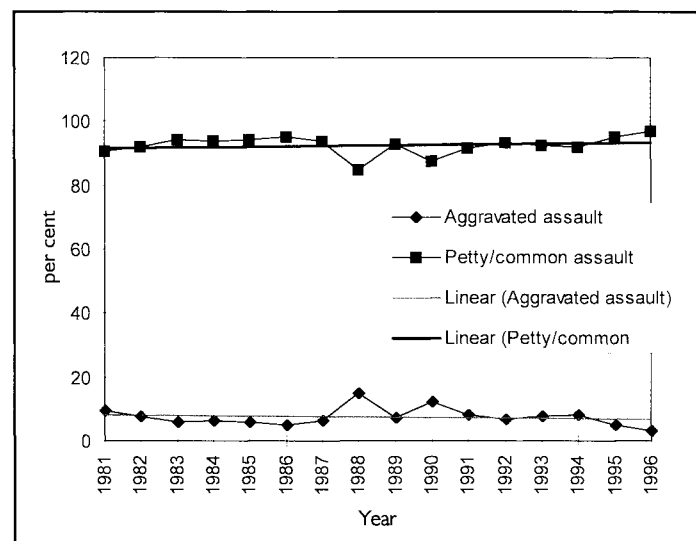


Figure 3: Kinds of assaults reported, 0- to 14-year-old victims (percentage of total reports)

## Prosecution of Reported Assaults

Prior to 1982, in the case of minor or moderate assaults committed on private property, legal proceedings could only be initiated by the victim or the victim's carer. (The prosecutor had the power to prosecute in the case of serious assaults.) Thus, the prosecutor could not proceed without the victim's consent, which had to be given explicitly to the police investigator. Since 1982 the prosecutor has been obliged to prosecute where there is sufficient evidence to proceed.

It might be supposed that the corporal punishment ban, together with such a change in prosecutorial policy, would lead to increased criminalisation of carers in cases of minor assaults. In fact, this has certainly not been the case. An examination of this issue requires an understanding of the Swedish prosecutorial process.

### Decisions to pursue reported assaults

When an assault report is made to the police, a preliminary investigation is carried out. The decision to pursue it further depends primarily on whether

- 1 the alleged perpetrator is at least 15 years of age;
- 2 adequate evidence exists, and
- 3 the alleged act constitutes a crime.

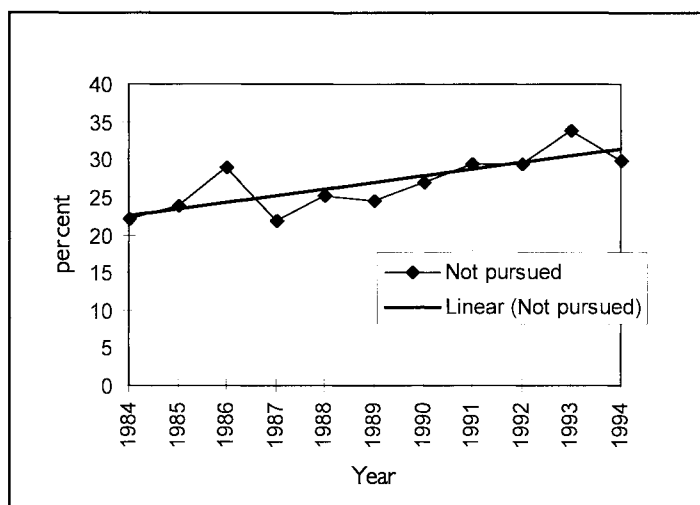


Figure 4: Percentage of assault reports not pursued, 0- to 14-year-old victims

If these criteria are not met, the investigation is not pursued.

### RATES OF REPORTS THAT ARE PURSUED

As Figure 4 demonstrates, the proportion of reports which were not pursued increased between 1984 and 1994 (SCB, 1995a). This trend appears to be due largely to an increase in reports of assaults by alleged perpetrators under the age of 15 against their peers (Figure 5). (Reports of assaults by children under the age of 15 against young children have not increased.) When these reports are removed from the analysis, the rate of reports that are not pursued remains steady between 1984 and 1994 (Figure 6). Reporting of assaults by youth against youth is discussed in detail in the section on youth crime (pages 21-5).

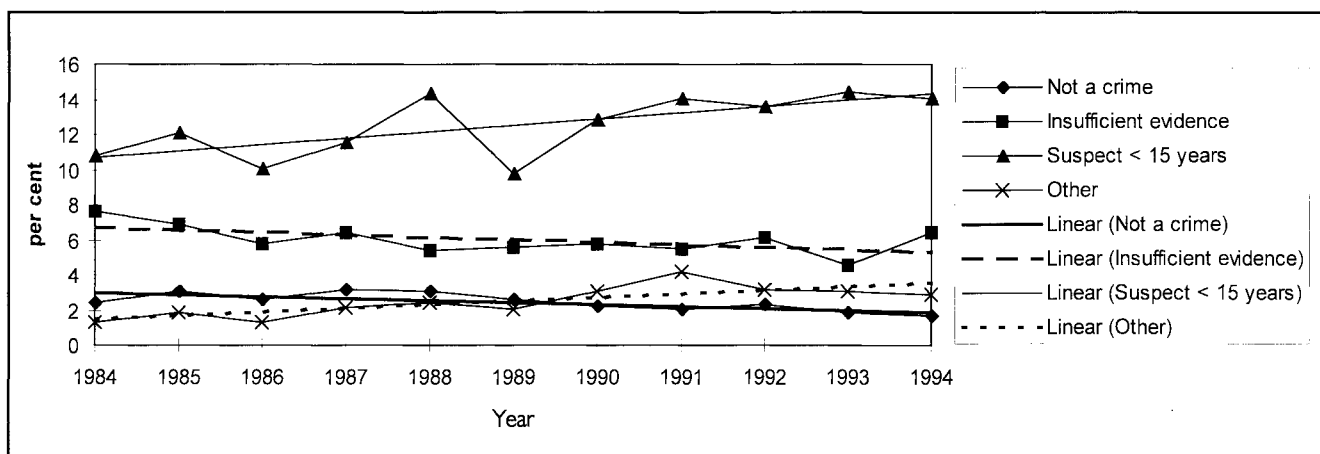


Figure 5: Reasons for assault reports not being pursued, 0- to 14-year-old victims (percentage of assault reports)

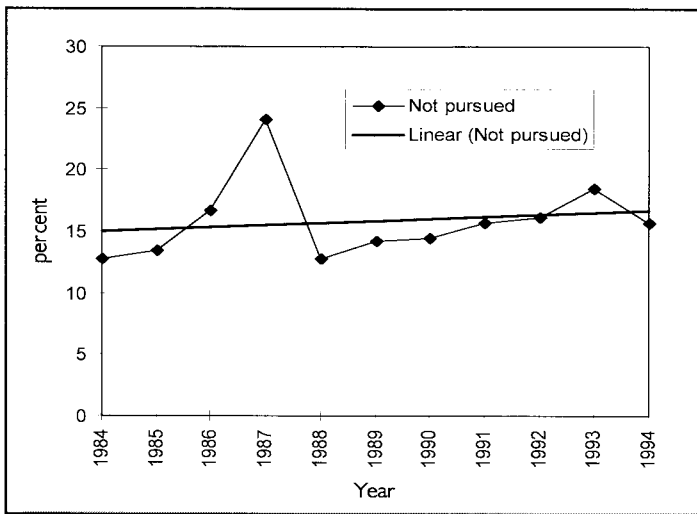


Figure 6: Percentage of assault reports not pursued: alleged perpetrators older than 15 years, 0- to 14-year-old victims

#### DECISIONS TO PROSECUTE REPORTED ASSAULTS

When a report is pursued, the alleged perpetrator becomes a 'suspect'. Four outcomes are possible: prosecution in court, summary punishment (generally a fine levied by the prosecuting attorney), a waiver of prosecution, or no measures may be taken. Summary punishments consist of day fines issued by the prosecutor, the number and size of which are determined by the seriousness of the crime and the suspect's income, respectively. In order to issue a summary punishment or a waiver of prosecution, the crime must be of a minor nature and the suspect must have confessed to its commission (Sarnecki, 1991).

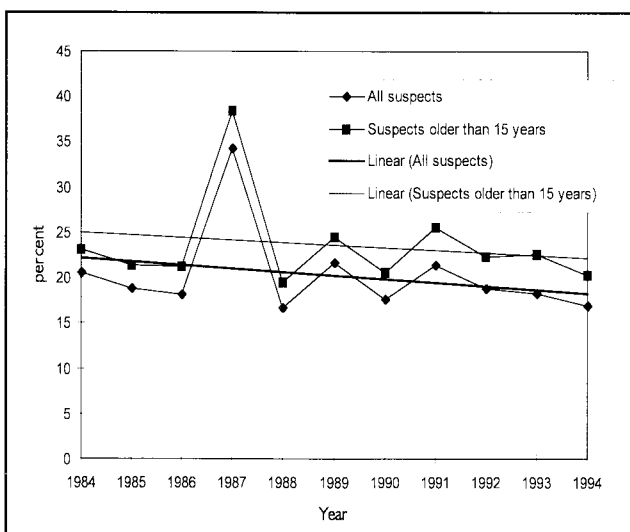


Figure 7: Prosecution rates, 0- to 14-year-old victims (percentage of reported assaults)

#### RATES OF REPORTS THAT ARE PROSECUTED

The rates of reported assaults that are prosecuted show a declining trend since 1984 (SCB, 1995a) (Figure 7). In order to determine whether this trend is accounted for by the increase in reported assaults by children under the age of 15, an analysis of prosecution rates was conducted on those reported crimes allegedly committed by individuals 15 years of age and older. As Figure 7 illustrates, prosecution rates show a declining trend even when only those individuals old enough to be prosecuted are included in the analysis.

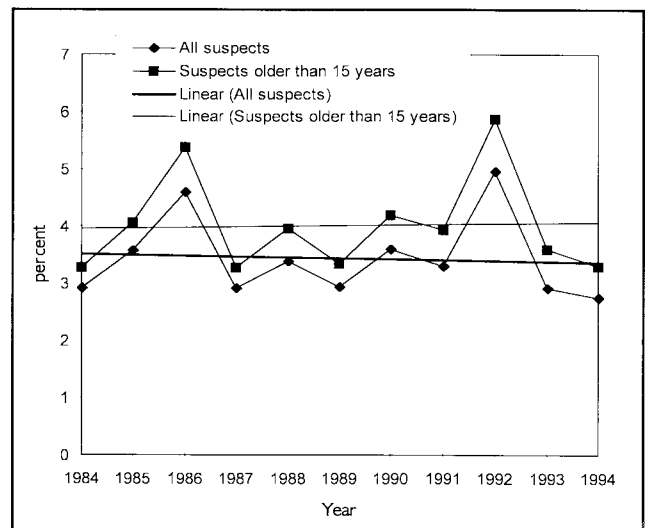


Figure 8: Rates of summary punishment, 0- to 14-year old victims (percentage of reported assaults)

#### RATES OF SUMMARY PUNISHMENTS AND WAIVERS OF PROSECUTION

The proportion of reports that end in summary punishments has remained steady since 1984 (Figure 8), while the proportion ending in prosecution waivers has declined (Figure 9, page 8) (SCB, 1995a). This is also the case when only those alleged offenders old enough to face prosecution are considered (Figures 8, above, and 9, page 14).

#### RATES OF PURSUED REPORTS FOR WHICH NO MEASURES ARE TAKEN

The proportion of reports which are pursued, but for which no measures are taken, shows an

## Characteristics of Individuals Suspected of Assault

Limited data are available on the characteristics of alleged perpetrators in cases of child assault that are pursued (SCB, 1995a). The following findings refer to this group of individuals, referred to here as 'suspects'. In this section, the focus will be on adult suspects; data regarding youth suspects will be presented in the section on youth crime (pages 21–5).

It is important to note that the data presented here are not limited to parents. They may include relatives, strangers, baby-sitters, or others who have contact with the child.

### Ages of individuals suspected of assault

It might reasonably be expected that behavioural change on a mass scale would occur slowly and that such effects would be seen over generations. If this were the case, we would expect to see the most substantial declines in assault rates among the youngest groups of parenting age. Figures 11 to 18 (pages 14–16) show the trends in the proportions of suspects in child assault cases who were in various age groups at the time of the alleged assault.

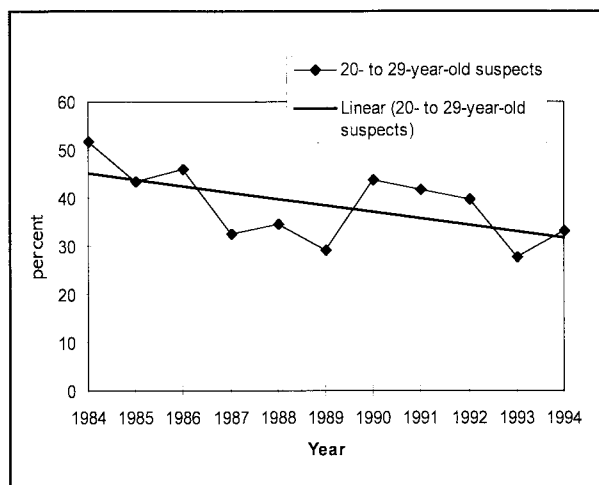


Figure 11: Suspects aged 20 to 29, 0- to 6-year-old victims (percentage of adult suspects)

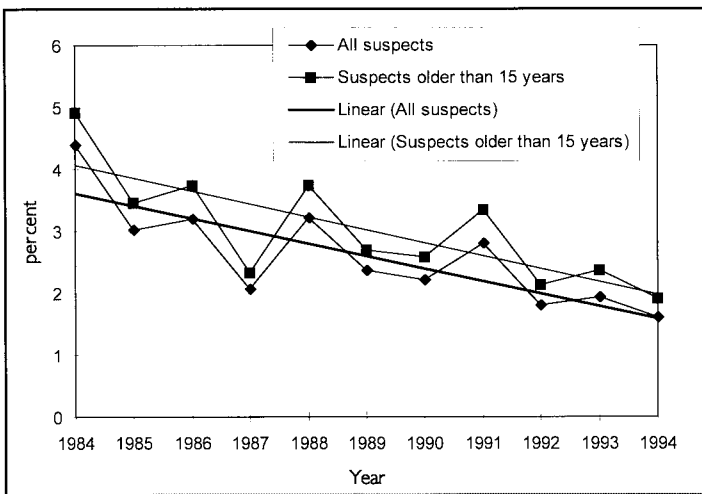


Figure 9: Rates of prosecution waivers, 0- to 14-year-old victims (percentage of reported assaults)

increasing trend between 1984 and 1994. This is still the case when only those offenders old enough to be prosecuted are considered (Figure 10).

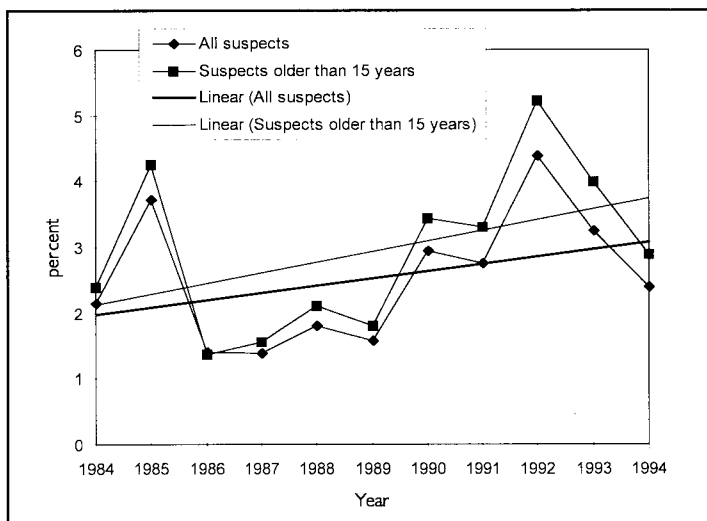


Figure 10: Pursued reports for which no measures are taken, 0- to 14-year-old victims (percentage of reported assaults)

### Summary

Overall trends indicate that the proportion of child assault reports that are not pursued has remained steady and prosecution rates have declined since 1984, even when reported assaults by alleged offenders too young to be prosecuted are excluded from the analysis, and despite a 1982 policy change making prosecution substantially easier to pursue. Together, these findings clearly indicate that the corporal punishment ban has not resulted in greater criminalisation of minor assaults by parents and other adults.

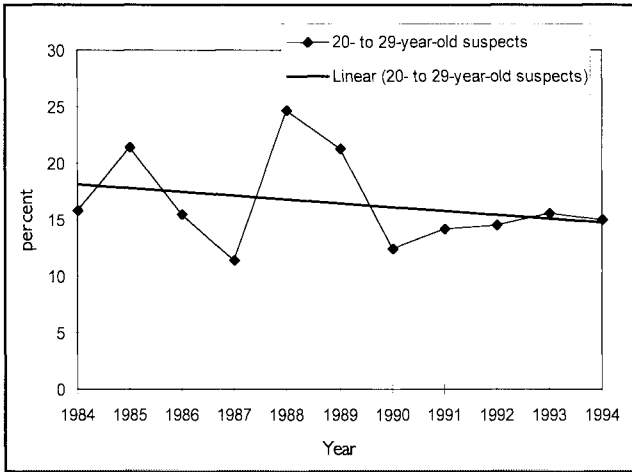


Figure 12: Suspects aged 20 to 29, 7- to 14-year-old victims (percentage of adult suspects)

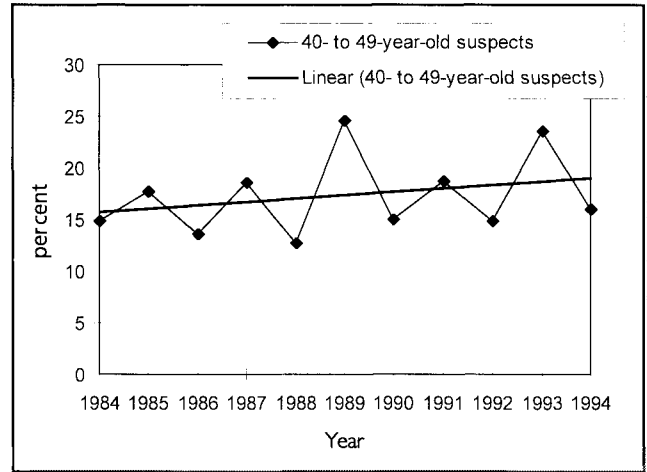


Figure 15: Suspects aged 40 to 49, 0- to 6-year-old victims (percentage of adult suspects)

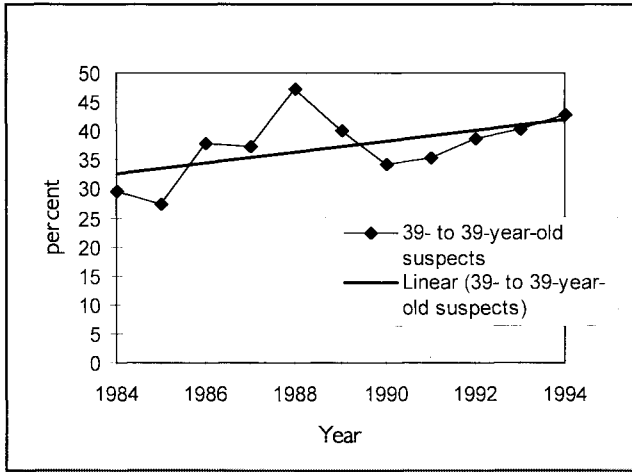


Figure 13: Suspects aged 30 to 39, 0- to 6-year-old victims (percentage of adult suspects)

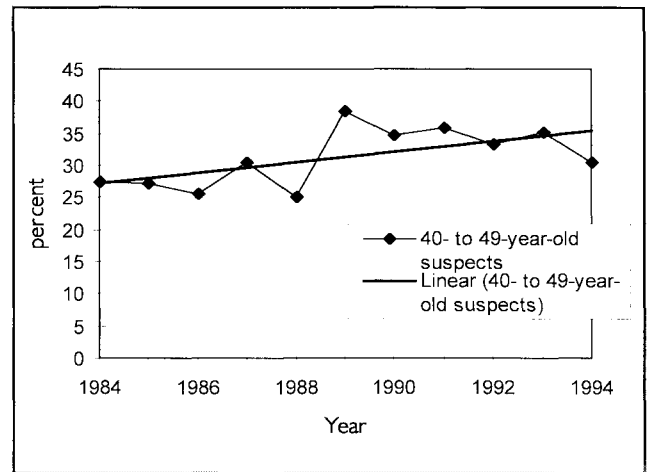


Figure 16: Suspects aged 40 to 49, 7- to 14-year-old victims (percentage of adult suspects)

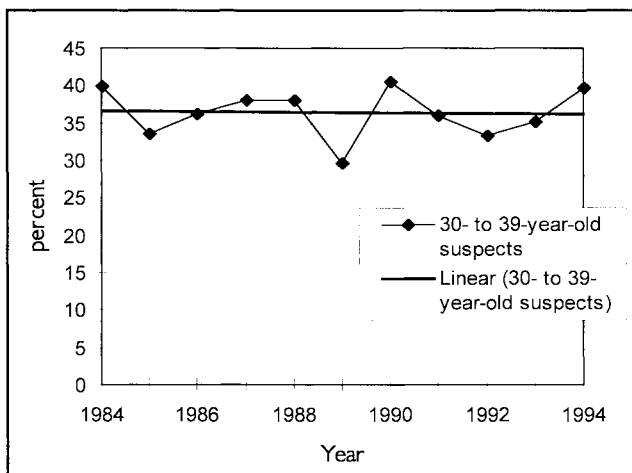


Figure 14: Suspects aged 30 to 39, 7- to 14-year-old victims (percentage of adult suspects)

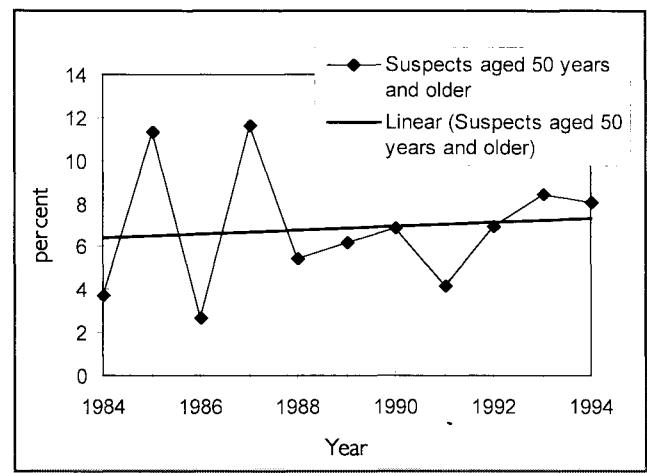


Figure 17: Suspects aged 50+ years, 0- to 6-year-old victims (percentage of adult suspects)

## Cultural socialisation of individuals suspected of assault

It cannot be assumed that all assaults against children in Sweden are carried out by individuals who were socialised within a social climate that rejects the use of corporal punishment. In fact, Sweden is a heterogeneous society with a large immigrant population. The annual number of people immigrating to Sweden more than doubled between 1980 and 1993 (in 1993, 90 per cent were from non-Nordic countries); the annual number of refugees seeking asylum in Sweden was 19 times greater in 1993 than it was in the early 1980s (Svenska Institutet, 1994). Recent immigrants, and refugees in particular, are likely to be experiencing high levels of stress and to have been raised in nations without corporal punishment bans. It seems reasonable, then, to expect that the proportion of assault suspects who were raised in nations without such bans and who arrived in Sweden as adults under stressful conditions would increase over time, while the proportion of assault suspects who were raised in Sweden or other nations with similar bans would decrease over time, as the bans and accompanying educational efforts had their long-term effects.

Figure 19 presents the proportions of suspects who were Swedish or other Nordic citizens (the other Nordic countries implemented corporal punishment bans through the 1980s), and non-Nordic citizens. As expected, the proportion of assault suspects who are Swedish or Nordic declined between 1984 and 1994; the proportion who are non-Nordic citizens increased (SCB, 1995a).

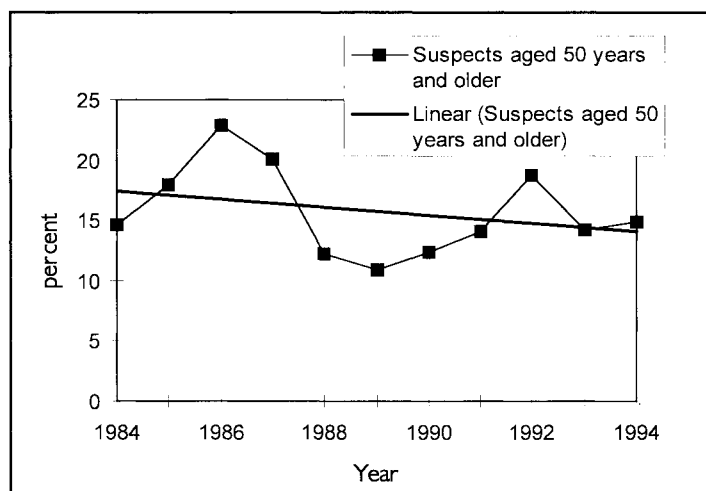


Figure 18: Suspects aged 50+ years, 7- to 14-year-old victims (percentage of adult suspects)

If the ban and its accompanying public education campaigns were effective, the results would be most strongly evident among those individuals who were themselves reared or who were raising young children after the ban was passed. They would be less strongly evident among those groups reared before the ban was passed. In particular, it might be expected that the ban would have its weakest effect on individuals reared prior to the ban's implementation and who are themselves raising young children, as pre-schoolers are the most likely age group to receive corporal punishment (Wauchope & Straus, 1992).

The figures presented here support this hypothesis (SCB, 1995a). The largest decrease over time, as a proportion of total suspects, is seen among 20- to 29-year-olds – particularly with regard to assaults against young children (Figures 11 and 12, pages 14 and 15 above). The proportion of this age group who would have been children when the ban was passed increased each year. Concomitantly, the proportion of total suspects that they constitute decreased over the decade.

In contrast, the proportion of suspects charged with assaults against young children who were in their 30s showed the largest increase over the same period (Figure 13, page 15 above). Therefore, it appears that the greatest shift in the proportion of suspects charged with assaults against young children took place between the two age groups most likely to be parenting young children and who are distinguished by the timing of their own births relative to the passage of the corporal punishment ban.

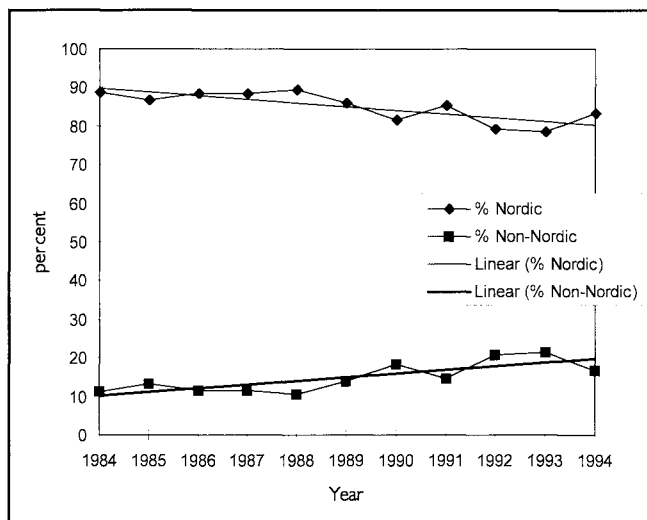


Figure 19: Percentage of suspects of Nordic and non-Nordic origin, 0- to 14-year-old victims

## Summary

When the characteristics of suspects in child assault cases are examined, the desired effects of the corporal punishment ban become even more strongly evident. The proportion of suspects comprising adults reared after the passage of the ban has decreased since 1984, as has the proportion who are citizens of Sweden or other Nordic countries. This demonstrates that individuals raised within a social climate rejecting corporal punishment are decreasingly likely to become suspects in child assault cases.

## Estimates of Rates of Physical Abuse Against Children

Clearly reporting rates are not equivalent to rates of actual assaults against children. As public awareness of child physical abuse increases, reporting rates will increase accordingly – even if rates of actual abuse remain steady or decline. Therefore, additional measures are needed to determine whether the recent trends in reporting rates reflect increased public awareness of the problem or actual increases in child physical abuse.

The extent of violence against children in a nation can be assessed through an examination of the most severe assaults – those which result in death. As Figure 20 demonstrates, criminal child deaths in Sweden have remained at a constantly low rate since at least the mid-1970s, never exceeding 0.009 per 1,000 children (SCB, 1976a, 1978a, 1979a, 1980a, 1981a, 1982a, 1983a, 1984a, 1985a, 1986a, 1987a, 1988a, 1990a, 1991a, 1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1994a, 1994b, 1996a, 1997a, 1998). By the late 1980s, the rate of infant (under one year of age) homicide was among the lowest in the world; this rate (0.009 per 1,000 live births) reflected the criminal death of only one infant between 1985 and 1990 (Belsey, 1993).

It is important to note that physical abuse is not the only cause of criminal deaths of children. For example, they can occur within the context of suicide of the perpetrator, neglect or neonaticide (Somander & Rammer, 1991). Therefore, only a subset of these deaths resulted from child physical abuse. It is this latter group that the World Health Organization (WHO) considers to reflect most reliably the rate of child abuse in a nation (UNICEF, 1994).

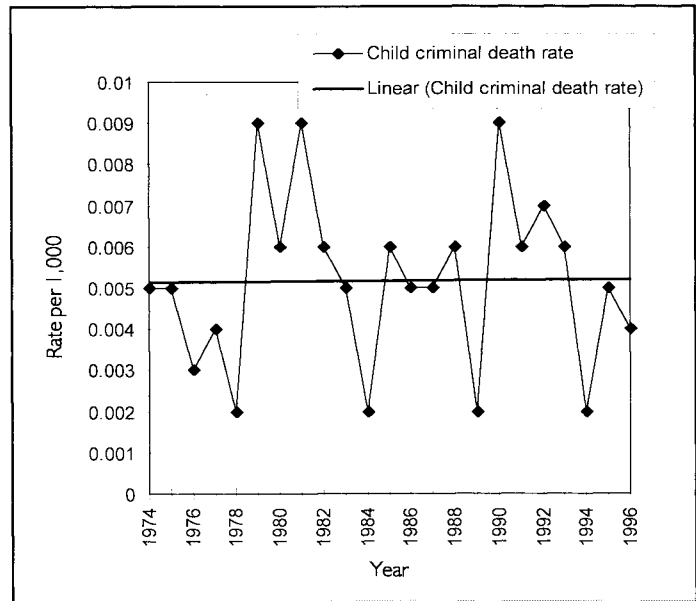


Figure 20: Child criminal death rate, 0- to 14-year-old victims (per 1,000 population)

Between 1971 and 1975, five children died in Sweden as a result of physical abuse; all of these children died during incidents in which the parent's motive was 'a disciplinary measure to eliminate a disturbing behaviour of a child without the intention to kill' (Somander & Rammer, 1991, p. 53). However, during the ensuing 15 years (1976 to 1990), not a single child died as a result of abuse in all of Sweden (SCB, 1978a, 1979a, 1980a, 1981a, 1982a, 1983a, 1984a, 1985a, 1986a, 1987a, 1988a, 1990a, 1991a, 1992a, 1992b). From 1990 to 1996, four children died from the effects of physical abuse; only one of them was killed by a parent (SCB, 1992a, 1993a, 1994a, 1994b, 1996a, 1997a, 1998a).

## Summary

Reports of assaults against children cannot be assumed to reflect rates of child physical abuse accurately, as they also reflect public awareness of the problem. Child abuse mortality rates, which indicate the extent of physical abuse in a nation, are very low in Sweden – for 14 years no children died as a result of abuse in that country. Recent fluctuations of the rate from zero reflect the death of one child in each of four years between 1990 and 1996. These findings suggest that recent trends in reporting rates reflect increased public awareness of the problem of child abuse, rather than an increase in actual abuse.

## Measures Taken by the Social Authorities

One of the goals of the corporal punishment ban was to encourage earlier intervention in cases of children at risk in order to make child welfare work more proactive and less reactive. It was expected that child welfare measures would become increasingly preventive, as professionals could begin to legitimately discourage the use of physical force with children and provide supportive measures to families at risk. An examination of support and care statistics (Socialstyrelsen, 1995a, 1996a) revealed the following findings.

### Numbers of children receiving support and care measures

As might be expected from the increase in rates of reported assaults against and by children, the numbers of children subject to one or more support or care measures in any given year show an increasing trend between 1982 and 1995 (Figure 21). However, as the analysis below shows, the proportion of interventions involving out-of-home placements has declined substantially and the kinds of interventions implemented have become increasingly preventive and supportive of families (Socialstyrelsen, 1995a, 1996a). Further, it must be noted that these figures represent the total number of children subject to measures at any time during each year – that is, all those still receiving measures first implemented in previous years, plus all those who received measures for the first time during that year.

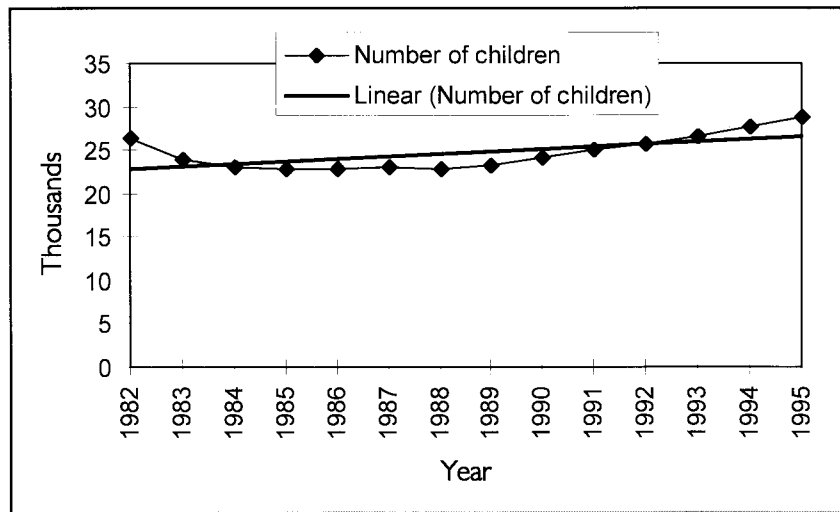


Figure 21: Children subject to support and care measures at some time during the year (1,000s)

When the numbers of children receiving support and care measures for the first time in a given year ('debutant children' – those not receiving such measures within the previous five years) are examined, a similar trend is seen (Figure 22) (Socialstyrelsen, 1995a, 1996a). The annual average number of debutant children receiving support or care measures was 5,692, yielding an average rate of 3.0 per 1,000 population in the 0- to 17-year-old age group (range = 2.4 to 3.6).

An appropriate interpretation of these figures requires an understanding of the kinds of measures possible in Sweden.

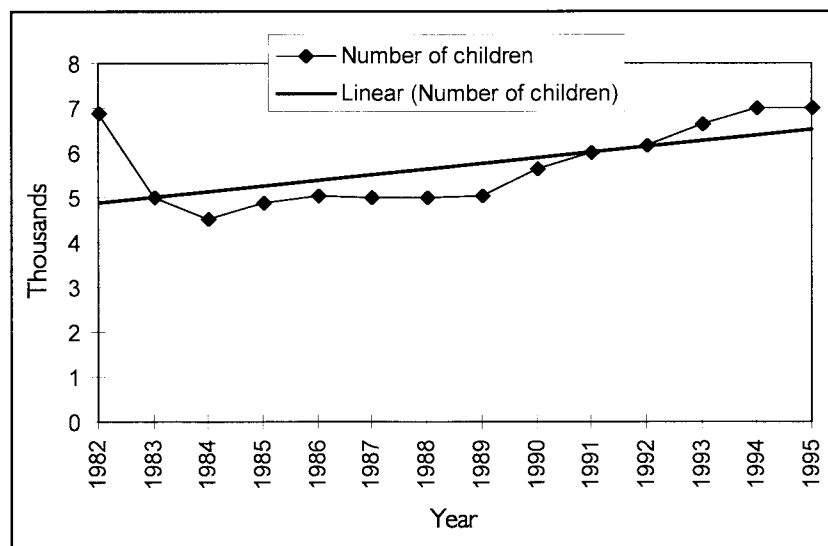


Figure 22: 'Debutant' children subject to support and care measures (1,000s)

## Kinds of measures

Social services professionals are guided by two acts:

- the Social Services Act (*Socialtjänstlagen: SoL*), and
- the Special Provisions for Care of Young People Act (*Lagen med särskilda bestämmelser om vård av unga: LVU*).

*SoL* measures are voluntary – that is, they are carried out with parental consent – while *LVU* measures are compulsory. Either of these kinds of measures can be implemented if the home is deficient (i.e., in the case of abuse, neglect, parental substance abuse, parental physical or mental illness), or if the child's health and development is jeopardised by his or her own behaviour.

It is important to note that children under the age of 15 alleged to have committed a criminal act are always referred to social services; although they are registered in the police statistics, the responsibility for dealing with their crimes lies with the social, not judicial, authorities. Response to crimes committed by youth between the ages of 15 and 18 (or, in some cases, 20) is shared between social services and the criminal justice system. For example, waivers of prosecution for offenders under the age of 18 are often issued on condition that appropriate measures are undertaken by social services (Sarnecki, 1991). For those young offenders who are successfully prosecuted, court-imposed sanctions can include care in accordance with the Social Services Act. Therefore, it should be remembered that Swedish support and care statistics include young offenders.

The Social Services Act (*SoL*), passed in 1982, altered substantially policies regarding children receiving support and care measures. This Act was intended to reduce compulsion and increase voluntary and preventive measures. Previously, under the Child Welfare Act, a warning was issued which, if unsuccessful, was followed by an order to stop the high-risk behaviour. If this failed, a supervisor was appointed. If this was insufficient to end the behaviour, the child could be taken into care. The new Act of 1982 abolished these steps and replaced them with the 'contact person' (or 'contact family'), whose role is to provide friendship and support to the family on a voluntary, preventive basis (Gould, 1988; Sarnecki, 1991).

### RELATIVE PROPORTIONS OF *SOL* VS. *LVU* MEASURES

Together with the intended preventive function of the corporal punishment ban, it might be expected that the new Act would have led to an increase in

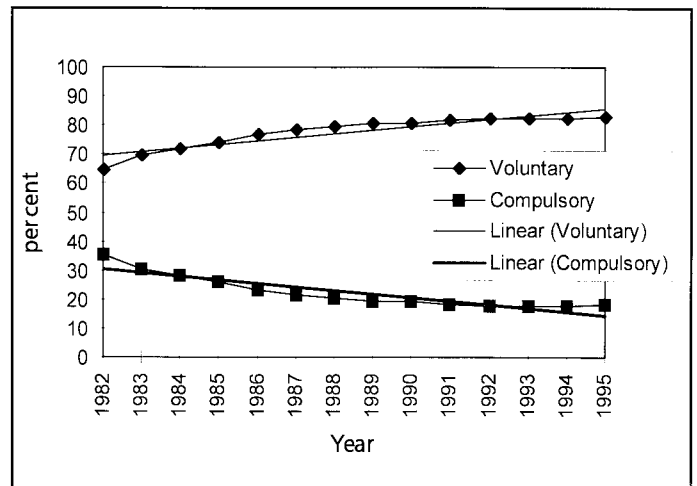


Figure 23: Voluntary and compulsory measures in place at some time during the year (percentage of total measures)

voluntary measures and a decrease in compulsory measures since 1982. Figure 23 demonstrates that this has been the case. In every year since 1982, the majority of measures have been of a voluntary nature and the difference in the proportions of the two kinds of measures has steadily increased (Socialstyrelsen, 1995a, 1996a). Between 1982 and 1995, the number of compulsory measures administered annually declined by 46 per cent (Table 1, page 20). In 1995 fewer than 20 per cent of measures were implemented without parental consent.

### ABSOLUTE NUMBERS OF *SOL* AND *LVU* MEASURES

As shown in Table 1, the number of *SoL* measures administered increased by 46 per cent between 1982 and 1995, while the number of *LVU* measures administered decreased by 46 per cent over the same period. Therefore, although the total number of measures administered increased during this period, this increase is accounted for by an increase in voluntary, rather than compulsory, measures.

### RELATIVE PROPORTIONS OF *SOL* MEASURES

*SoL* measures are of two kinds:

- assignment of a contact person, or
- placement of the child outside the parental home (generally in a foster home, a children's home operated by a county council, a special supervisory home, a privately-operated care home, or a children's psychiatric clinic).

If the emphasis upon prevention which the corporal punishment ban was meant to reflect has borne fruit, we would expect to see an increase in the assignment of contact persons and a decrease in out-of-home placements.

Table 1: Numbers of support and care measures administered in 1982 and 1995

Kind of measure	Year		% change
	1982	1995	
Debutant children			
SoL contact person	3,185	4,506	+ 42
SoL out-of-home care	3,717	2,653	- 29
<b>Total SoL</b>	<b>6,902</b>	<b>7,159</b>	<b>+ 4</b>
LVU short-term care	731	782	+ 7
LVU long-term care	391	420	+ 7
<b>Total LVU</b>	<b>1,122</b>	<b>1,202</b>	<b>+ 7</b>
<b>Total out-of-home care</b>	<b>4,839</b>	<b>3,855</b>	<b>- 20</b>
<b>Total measures</b>	<b>8,024</b>	<b>8,361</b>	<b>+ 4</b>
Total number of children receiving measures			
SoL contact person	7,369	17,230	+ 134
SoL out-of-home care	12,141	11,246	- 7
<b>Total SoL</b>	<b>19,510</b>	<b>28,476</b>	<b>+ 46</b>
LVU short-term out-of-home care	1,104	1,394	+ 26
LVU long-term out-of-home care	9,562	4,357	- 54
<b>Total LVU</b>	<b>10,666</b>	<b>5,751</b>	<b>- 46</b>
<b>Total out-of-home care</b>	<b>22,807</b>	<b>16,997</b>	<b>- 26</b>
<b>Total measures</b>	<b>30,176</b>	<b>34,227</b>	<b>+ 13</b>

Note: These figures represent the number of measures administered, not the number of children receiving measures. Therefore, children can be counted more than once.

Source: Socialstyrelsen, 1995a, 1996a.

#### ABSOLUTE NUMBERS OF SUBTYPES OF SOL MEASURES

As indicated in Table 1, the total number of children in voluntary out-of-home placements declined by 7 per cent between 1982 and 1995. At the same time, the total number of contact persons assigned increased by 134 per cent. With regard to debutant children, the number placed in voluntary out-of-home care declined by 29 per cent and the number of contact persons assigned increased by 42 per cent during this period.

#### RELATIVE PROPORTIONS OF SUBTYPES OF LVU MEASURES

Under the Special Provisions for Care of Young People Act (LVU), three measures are possible:

- 1 short-term out-of-home care, primarily during investigations;
- 2 long-term or permanent out-of-home care, and
- 3 assignment of a contact person, a measure available since 1985.

These measures are undertaken when the well-being of the child is seriously jeopardized.

When the proportions of each kind of measure in place at some time during each year are examined (Figure 25), it is once again found that the most serious measure (long-term out-of-home care) has declined in relation to the more moderate measure (short-term out-of-home care) (Socialstyrelsen, 1995a, 1996a). The assignment of contact persons has remained at a low rate, most likely because of the serious nature of these families' difficulties which would warrant more drastic intervention.

As Figure 24 illustrates, these shifts have taken place. While in 1982 the proportion of measures involving out-of-home placements exceeded those involving provision of contact persons, by 1989 the reverse was true and this trend has continued through the mid-1990s (Socialstyrelsen, 1995a, 1996a). The proportion of measures involving the assignment of contact persons has more than doubled, while that involving out-of-home placements has been reduced by one-third.

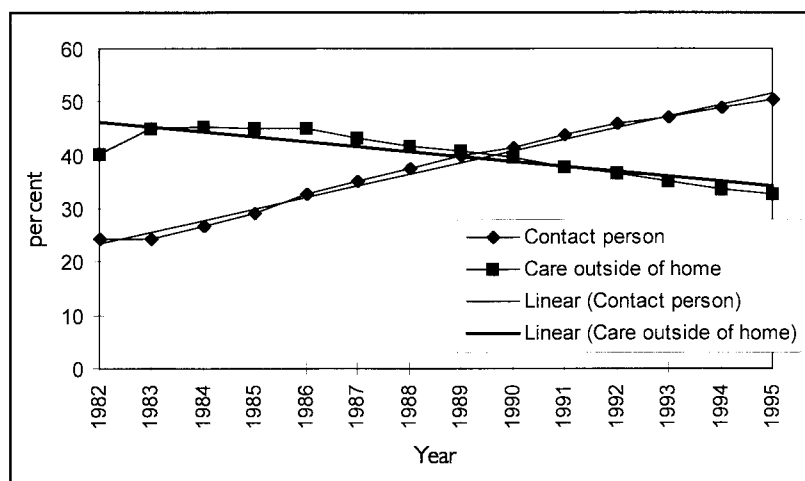


Figure 24: Two kinds of voluntary measures in place at some time during the year (percentage of total voluntary measures)

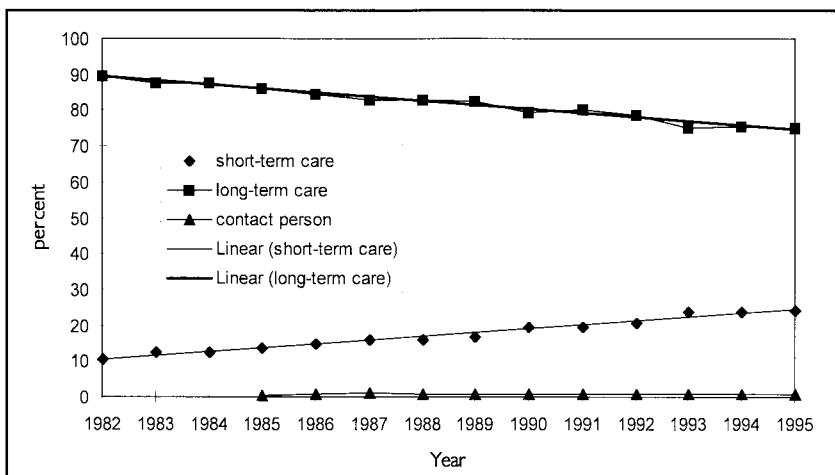


Figure 25: Three kinds of compulsory measures in place at some time during the year (percentage of total compulsory measures)

#### ABSOLUTE NUMBERS OF LVU MEASURES

As demonstrated in Table 1, between 1982 and 1995 there was a net decrease of 46 per cent in the number of LVU measures administered (excluding LVU contact persons, which were instituted in 1985). While short-term LVU care increased by 26 per cent, long-term LVU care decreased by 54 per cent. With regard to debutant children, there has been a slight (7 per cent) increase in both short- and long-term LVU measures.

### Summary

Since 1982, support and care interventions have become increasingly preventive, voluntary, and supportive of families. The proportion of measures carried out with parental consent has increased. Of these, the proportion involving out-of-home placements has been reduced by one-third, while the proportion involving the assignment of support persons has doubled. Of compulsory interventions, which constitute fewer than 20 per cent of measures, the proportion comprising long-term measures has decreased while the proportion comprising short-term measures has increased.

Although the absolute number of children receiving support and care measures increased between 1982 and 1995, this increase is largely accounted for by a large increase in the voluntary assignment of contact persons. Out-of-home placements have shown a net decline of 26 per cent. Clearly the corporal punishment ban has not resulted in an increase in child apprehensions or other coercive measures. In fact, in the period since the ban took effect there has been a substantial decrease in such measures.

## Youth Crime

The corporal punishment ban was not intended to address the problem of youth crime in Sweden. However, it might be argued that without a legal sanction to administer corporal punishment, parents may be rearing children who lack discipline and self-control. If this were the case, we would expect to see increases in criminal behaviour among youth.

Crime statistics indicate that, rather than increasing,

the number of 15- to 17-year-olds found guilty of a criminal offence remained steady between 1983 and 1996 (BRÅ, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998; SCB 1984b, 1985b, 1986b, 1987b, 1988b, 1989, 1990b, 1991b, 1992c, 1993b). The analysis below shows that major violence by and toward young people has not increased since the mid-1970s, and an increase in reports of youth violence against peers is more a function of enforcement than of a change in the behaviour of young people.

In this section, trends in youth crime will be examined with emphasis on the three categories of crime most relevant to this age group – theft, narcotics crimes, and assault.

### Theft

The crime of which young people in Sweden are most likely to be found guilty is theft. This is also a category which is relatively unsusceptible to changes in reporting trends.

#### OVERALL TRENDS

As Figure 26 (page 22) shows, the proportion of individuals convicted of theft who were between the ages of 15 and 17 years showed an overall declining trend between 1975 and 1996 (BRÅ, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998; SCB, 1976b, 1977, 1978b, 1979b, 1980b, 1981b, 1982b, 1983b, 1984b, 1985b, 1986b, 1987b, 1988b, 1989, 1990b, 1991b, 1992c, 1993b). A decline was seen in all forms of theft, with the most serious offences showing the greatest declines (Figure 27, page 22).

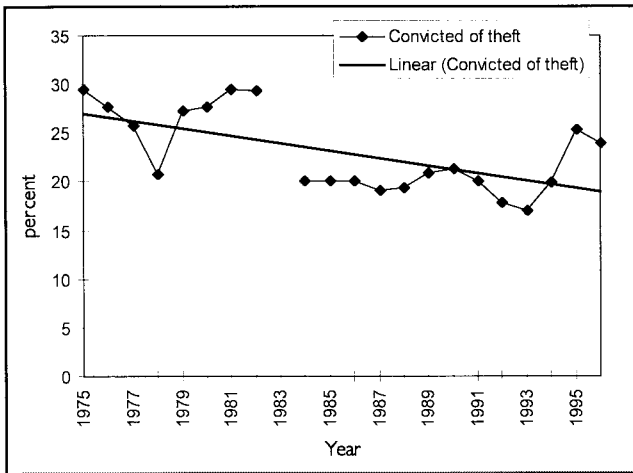


Figure 26: Persons aged 15 to 17 convicted of theft (percentage of total theft convictions)

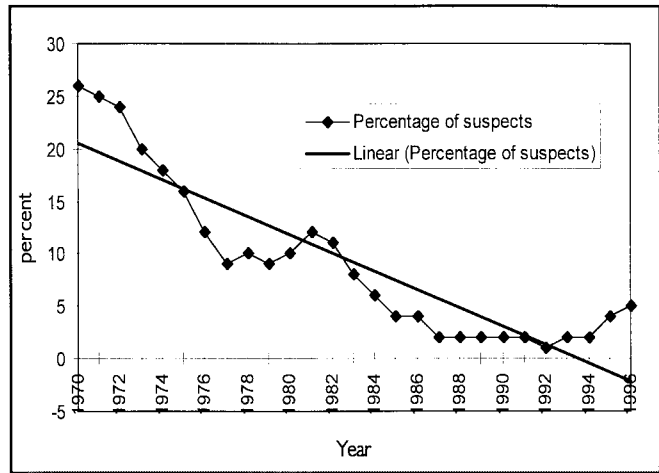


Figure 28: Persons aged 15 to 17 suspected of narcotics crimes (percentage of total suspects)

**COHORT ANALYSES**

Table 2 indicates that the mean proportion of individuals convicted of theft who were in the pre-ban youth cohort was approximately 21 per cent higher than the mean proportion of individuals convicted of theft who were in the post-ban youth cohort. A decrease is seen in all forms of theft, although the differences are greater with regard to the more serious offences.

**Narcotics crimes**

**OVERALL TRENDS**

As demonstrated in Figure 28, the proportion of all suspects in narcotics crimes who were between 15 and 17 years of age declined by 75 per cent between 1970 and 1996 (FHI & CAN, 1997, 1998). The

proportion of all persons convicted of narcotics trafficking who were 15 to 17 years of age also declined between 1975 and 1996 (BRÅ, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998; SCB, 1976b, 1977, 1978b, 1979b, 1980b, 1981b, 1982b, 1983b, 1984b, 1985b, 1986b, 1987b, 1988b, 1989, 1990b, 1991b, 1992c, 1993b) (Figure 29).

**COHORT ANALYSES**

The proportion of suspects charged in narcotics offences who were 15 to 17 years of age at the time of the offence was almost four times greater in the pre-ban cohort than in the post-ban cohort. The mean proportion of those convicted of narcotics trafficking who were in the pre-ban youth cohort was twice as great as the mean proportion of those convicted of such offences who were in the post-ban youth cohort (Table 2).

An earlier investigation of age cohorts (Olsson, 1996) found that among those born in 1958–9 (who were 15 years old in 1973–4), many more were convicted of serious drug offences than among those born after 1966 (who were 15 years old in 1981 or later), despite a police enforcement wave in the early 1980s.

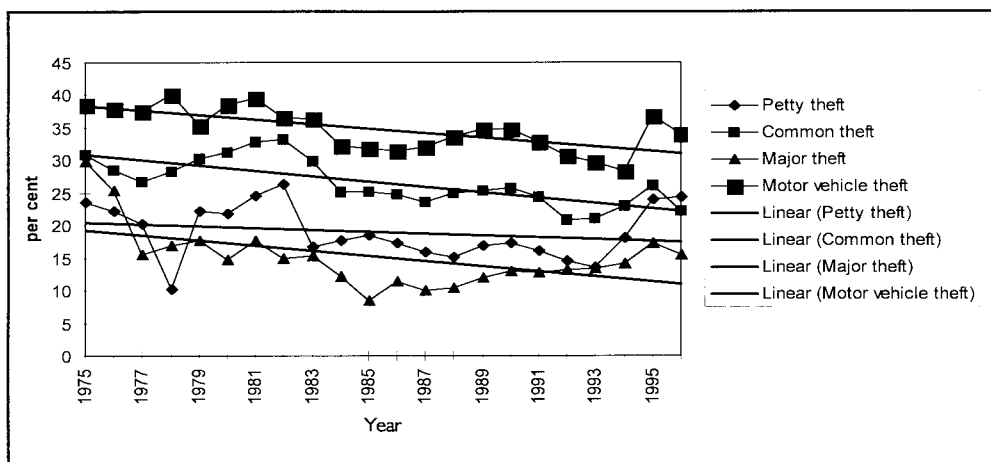


Figure 27: Persons aged 15 to 17 convicted of four kinds of theft (percentage of total convictions)

# Assault by young people against children and young people

## OVERALL TRENDS

Figure 30 (page 24) shows that the proportion of suspects aged 15 to 19 in cases of alleged assaults against young children (aged 0 to 6) showed a declining trend between 1984 and 1994 (SCB, 1995a). The annual mean number of youth suspected of assaults against young children was 3, with a range of 0 to 5 over the decade.

However, one crime category that has not shown a decreasing trend is police reports of violence by youth against other youth. The proportion of reported assaults against children that were allegedly carried out by youth under the age of 15 increased between 1984 and 1994 (SCB, 1995a) (Figure 5, page 12 above). Further, the proportion of suspects in cases of assault against 7- to 14-year-olds who were between the ages of 15 and 19 years also showed an increasing trend during this period (SCB, 1995a) (Figure 31, page 24).

## COHORT ANALYSES

Data on ages of suspects in cases of assaults against children were not available between 1974 and 1979, so it was not possible to conduct appropriate cohort analyses for these variables.

Does this trend indicate a true increase in youth violence against peers? These data can only be understood within their social and historical contexts. Sweden has been re-defining and attempting to reduce the use of physical force over the past 150 years. Virtually all forms of private use of force (for example, spousal assault, marital rape), and most forms of public use of force (for example, professional boxing, corporal punishment of soldiers and prisoners, capital punishment) have been defined as illegitimate violence, and prohibited (von Hofer, 1995). A more recent example is the campaign against bullying in schools. As a result of this effort, such behaviour has lost its previous legitimacy and is defined as assault (von Hofer, 1995). The Education Act now states that schools are responsible for counteracting bullying. In 1990, the Occupational Safety and Health Act was extended to include pupils. It states that the authorities responsible for the school should have rules and regulations for countering bullying. The organisation of the police has been changed recently so that police officers work actively in the schools on

Table 2: Annual means of two youth cohorts on well-being measures

Measure	Cohort		% change
	1975-79	1992-96	
Convicted of theft (% of total convictions) <sup>a</sup>	26.16	20.80	- 20.49
petty	19.69	18.90	- 4.01
common	28.88	22.70	- 21.40
major	21.06	14.70	- 30.20
motor vehicle	37.88	31.90	- 15.79
Suspected of narcotics offences (% of total suspects) <sup>a</sup>	11.20	2.80	- 75.00
Convicted of narcotics trafficking (% of total convictions) <sup>a</sup>	5.96	2.90	- 51.34
Consumer of alcohol (% of age group) <sup>b</sup>	89.10	77.90	- 12.57
Ever tried drugs (% of age group) <sup>b</sup>	7.48	5.40	- 27.81
Continue to use drugs (% of age group) <sup>b</sup>	2.00	0.83	- 58.50
Suicide rates (per 100,000) <sup>c</sup>	7.74	6.21	- 19.77

a 15- to 17-year-old youth; b 15- to 16-year-old youth; c 15- to 19-year-old youth.

Sources: BRÅ, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998; FHI & CAN, 1997, 1998; SCB, 1976b, 1977, 1978b, 1979b, 1980b, 1981b, 1982b, 1983b, 1984b, 1985b, 1986b, 1987b, 1988b, 1989, 1990b, 1991b, 1992c, 1993b.

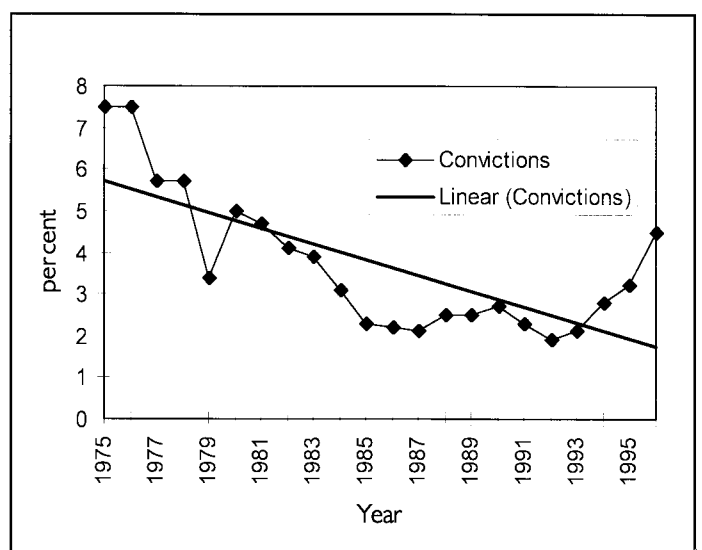


Figure 29: Persons aged 15 to 17 convicted of narcotics trafficking (percentage of total trafficking convictions)

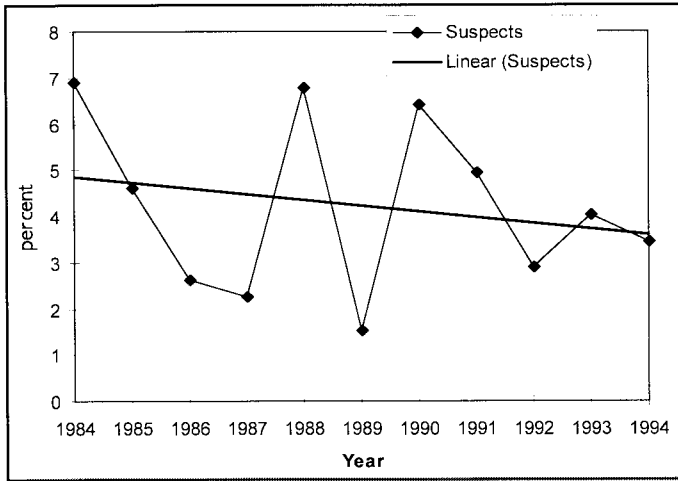


Figure 30: Persons aged 15 to 19 suspected of assault, 0- to 6-year-old victims (percentage of total suspects)

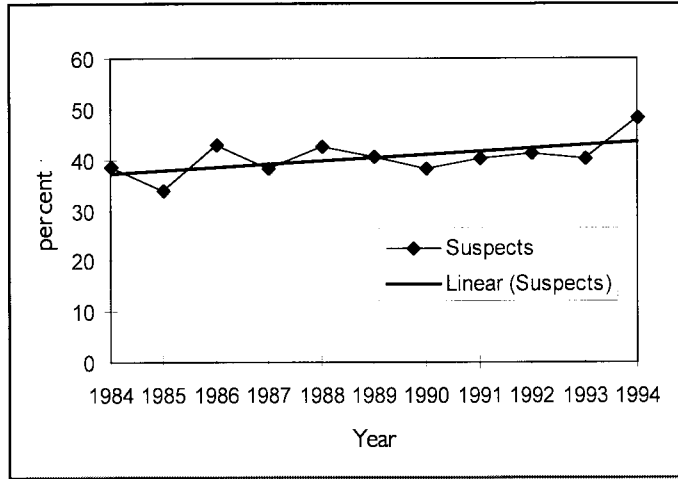


Figure 31: Persons aged 15 to 19 suspected of assault, 7- to 14-year-old victims (percentage of total suspects)

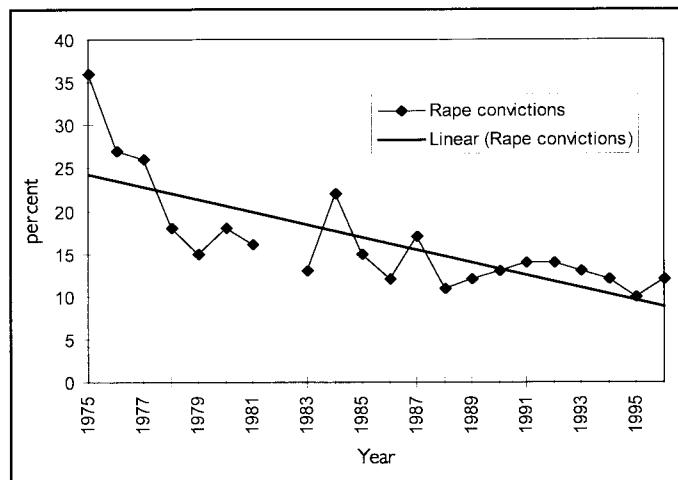


Figure 32: Persons aged 15 to 20 convicted of rape (percentage of total convictions)

this issue. All forms of bullying have been banned by the schools; principals now routinely report to the police any instances brought to their attention, however minor. The police, in turn, have no discretionary power in registering such reports; all are entered into the criminal statistics.

Increasing societal interest in juvenile violence over recent years, then, may be reflected in a greater willingness to report such acts, and in stronger enforcement. Therefore, a question arises as to whether the apparent increase in youth violence against peers is the result of a redefinition of violence and increased enforcement, or there has been a true increase in youth violence.

Five sources of data can help to answer this question. The first source is victimisation studies, which are based on the reports of young people regarding their experience of 'street violence', and self-report studies, based on juveniles' reports of commission of violence. Rates of victimisation and self-reported violence, which are not subject to fluctuations in enforcement, may better estimate the true rate of youth violence. The findings of these studies, carried out annually by Statistics Sweden, indicate that the victimisation rate of young people (aged 16 to 20) remained steady between 1976 and 1994 (Qvarnström & Mårtensson, 1996; von Hofer, 1995). Self-report studies have yielded similar findings (for example, Qvarnström & Mårtensson, 1996; Ward, 1998). These data suggest that the increase seen in reports of youth violence against peers is more a function of enforcement than of change in the behaviour of young people (Junger-Tas, 1996).

Second, the number of youthful homicide victims and the number of young people suspected of homicide can clarify the picture of major youth violence, as homicides are relatively unequivocal as indicators of major violence. The rate of homicides against young people (aged 15 to 19) remained consistently low from 1975 to 1994 (range = 0.2 to 1.6 per 100,000) (von Hofer, 1995). Similarly, the number of young people suspected of homicide remained low and stable in the same period (range = 0.8 to 3.2 per 100,000) (von Hofer, 1995). These findings suggest that major violence by and toward young people has not increased since the mid-1970s.

Third, an additional measure of youth violence is the trend in the percentage of individuals convicted of rape who are between the ages of 15 and 20 years. As Figure 32 demonstrates, this form of violence has decreased since 1975 (BRÅ, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998; SCB, 1976b, 1977, 1978b, 1979b, 1980b, 1981b, 1982b, 1983b, 1984b, 1985b, 1986b, 1987b, 1988b, 1989, 1990b, 1991b, 1992c, 1993b).

Fourth, during the period 1984 to 1994, the number of youths aged 15 to 20 convicted of assaults on victims of all ages increased by a factor of 1.68 (BRÅ, 1994, 1996; SCB 1985b, 1986b, 1987b, 1988b, 1989, 1990b, 1991b, 1992c, 1993b). The number of adults aged over 21 convicted of assault on victims of all ages increased to a very similar degree – a factor of 1.17. Therefore this increase does not appear to be a phenomenon unique to youth.

Fifth, seasonal trends in youth violence may shed light on the degree to which the increase seen is a result of school enforcement policies. An analysis of such trends conducted by Olsson (1995) indicates a clear pattern of increased reporting of assault against older children (aged 7 to 14) during the school months and decreased reporting during the vacation months. Further, Olsson found that approximately 60 per cent of reported assaults against 7- to 14-year-olds take place on weekdays; in contrast, only 20 to 30 per cent of reported assaults against adults take place on weekdays. Together, these findings suggest that schools are responsible for most of the assault reporting among this age group, lending support to the hypothesis that the apparent increase in youth violence is largely accounted for by a recent school enforcement wave.

## Summary

The involvement of Swedish youth in criminal activity has declined markedly since the mid-1970s. In particular, youth involvement in theft and narcotics crimes has shown a dramatic decrease over the past 20 years. While reports of youth assaults against peers have increased, evidence from a range of sources suggests that this trend is largely attributable to increased enforcement of school anti-bullying policies. Reports of youth assaults against young children have decreased, as have convictions of young people for rape. A recent paper on juvenile crime trends in post-war Europe notes that victim surveys, self-report studies and homicide rates in Sweden suggest that levels of violence by juveniles have remained stable since 1980. In fact, 'self-report studies from Denmark and Sweden indicate that the youth of today are more and not less disciplined than juveniles in the seventies' (Estrada, 1999). Together, these findings indicate that Swedish young people have not become unruly or undersocialised as a result of the corporal punishment ban.

## Youth Well-Being

In the public debate, youth crime is often cited as the primary indicator of the health of a society's young people. It is, however, only one of a number of indicators that should be considered. In this section, three such indicators will be addressed in relation to Sweden: alcohol use, drug use, and suicide.

## Alcohol use

### OVERALL TRENDS

Annual school survey data are available on the consumption of alcohol by young people aged 15 to 16. These data have been collected by the National Institute of Public Health (Folkhälsoinstitutet: FHI) and the Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (Centralförbundet för alkohol- och narkotikaupplysning: CAN). They indicate that the proportion of young people classified as 'consumers' of alcohol (consumption of at least one glass of beer, 2 cls. of wine, or 2 cls. of spirits during the past year) has been declining since 1971 (FHI & CAN, 1997, 1998) (Figure 33). Therefore, the proportion of young people who consume less than these amounts has been steadily increasing. Between 1979 and 1994, the average yearly consumption of alcohol has been 0.2 litres among 12- to 15-year-olds and 2.0 litres among 16- to 19-year-olds (FHI & CAN, 1997).

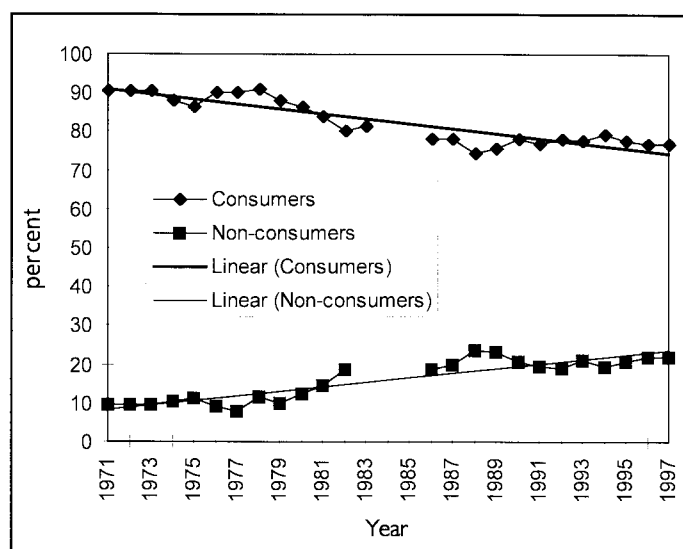


Figure 33: Percentage of 15- and 16-year-olds who do and do not consume alcohol

## COHORT ANALYSES

Table 2 (page 23 above) indicates that the percentage of 15- to 16-year-olds classified as alcohol consumers declined by almost 13 per cent between the pre- and post-ban cohorts.

## Drug use

### OVERALL TRENDS

Findings of questionnaire surveys indicate that the proportion of 15- to 16-year-olds who have tried drugs decreased between 1971 and 1997 (FHI & CAN, 1997, 1998). Approximately two-thirds of those who have tried drugs have tried cannabis only (FHI & CAN, 1997). The proportion of individuals in this age group who continued to use drugs, though negligible, also declined during this period (FHI & CAN, 1997, 1998) (Figure 34).

An estimate of the numbers and proportions of heavy drug users aged 15 to 17 can be obtained from the data on prosecutions of young people for narcotics crimes. The section on youth crime shows that these rates have declined substantially since 1975.

### COHORT ANALYSES

The percentage of youth aged 15 to 16 years who have ever tried drugs decreased by more than one-quarter between the pre- and post-ban cohorts; the percentage who continue to use drugs was more than halved (Table 2, page 23 above).

Other measures show similar trends. For example, two national surveys were carried out in 1979 (*Utredningen om narkotikamisbrukets omfattning*, 1980) and 1992 (Olsson, Byqvist, & Gomér, 1994). These surveys used case-finding techniques and included an estimated measure of unrecorded

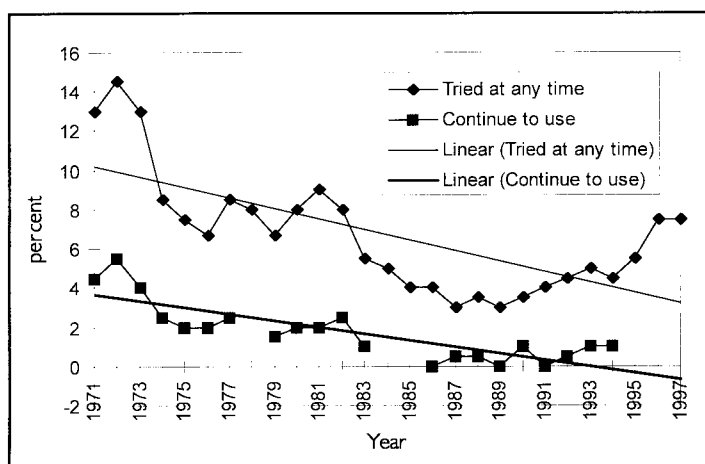


Figure 34: Percentage of 15- and 16-year-olds who have used drugs

cases. Table 3 presents the percentages of heavy drug users in two age categories. These figures suggest that individuals under the age of 20 are extremely unlikely to be heavy drug users. They also indicate that youth who were aged 10 to 19 (the most susceptible age for drug recruitment) in 1982 were only half as likely to become heavy drug users as those who were in this age group in 1969.

Table 3: Percentages of heavy drug users in two age categories

Year	Under 20 years of age	20-29 years of age
1979	6%	63%
1992	1%	30%

Source: Olsson, 1996

## Suicide

### OVERALL TRENDS

As Figure 35 demonstrates, the rate of suicide among youth aged 15 to 19 years showed an overall declining trend between 1970 and 1996 (Socialstyrelsen, 1970-1994, 1995b, 1996b).

### COHORT ANALYSES

The youth suicide rate declined by approximately 20 per cent between the pre- and post-ban cohorts (Socialstyrelsen, 1970-1994, 1995b, 1996b) (Table 2, page 23 above). In contrast, youth suicide rates doubled in the United Kingdom, the USA, and Canada between 1970 and 1991, and tripled in New Zealand (UNICEF, 1994).

## Summary

Alcohol and drug use by Swedish youth have declined since the early 1970s, indicating that the corporal punishment ban has not resulted in a liberalisation of youth from social constraints. Swedish youth appear to be exercising self-restraint and are decreasingly prone to problems of addiction. Further, data on youth suicide rates indicate that the most serious forms of self-destructive behaviour have decreased among this age group.

Clearly, trends in alcohol and drug use among youth cannot be attributed directly to the effects of the corporal punishment ban. Alcohol consumption in general is lower in Sweden than it is in many other countries (CAN & FHI, 1993; FHI & CAN, 1997), partially due to a long history of temperance,

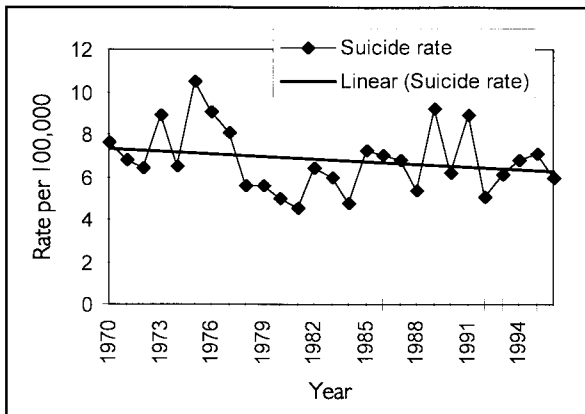


Figure 35: Suicide rates among individuals aged 15 to 19 (per 100,000)

as well as government regulatory policies and public health prevention programmes. In addition, Sweden has a highly restrictive drug enforcement policy (since the 1980s); a highly centralised and independent police organisation; low unemployment rates; a coherent set of active social policies; a geographical position that minimises exposure to the major European drug routes, and a well-developed drug treatment system (Lenke & Olsson, 1996). Further, drug education in schools began in the 1970s and charging policies were tightened in the 1980s (Knutsson & Kühlhorn, 1996; Olsson, 1996). Undoubtedly these factors have contributed to the patterns seen over time in alcohol and drug use among youth.

International comparisons of youth suicide rates are exceedingly difficult to conduct due to differences in willingness to record such deaths. However, when rates over time are compared within nations, Sweden is one of the few countries to show a decline between 1970 and 1991 (UNICEF, 1994). Of course, suicide is a highly complex phenomenon mediated by factors including depression, substance abuse, mental disorders, personal crises, and family disturbances. Therefore, no causal connections may be drawn between trends in suicide rates and the corporal punishment ban. However, it is clear that youth have not become more self-destructive following the ban's passage.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to examine trends in social variables relevant to the 1979 Swedish corporal punishment ban. The goals of the ban were to

- 1 reduce public support for corporal punishment;
- 2 encourage earlier identification of children at risk of physical abuse, and
- 3 facilitate earlier, more supportive intervention.

Data collected from a range of official sources indicate that these objectives are being met. Support for corporal punishment has declined markedly since 1965; reporting of assaults against children has increased, but criminalisation has shown a declining trend; the proportion of suspects in child assault cases who were raised in Sweden after the ban's passage has decreased, and child welfare measures have become increasingly preventive, non-coercive and supportive.

The behaviour of Swedish youth was also investigated to assess the degree to which children may have become undisciplined or anomic as a result of the ban. Data were examined regarding

- 1 the three major categories of youth crime (theft, narcotics crimes, and violence);
- 2 use of alcohol and drugs, and
- 3 suicide.

The findings indicate that Swedish youth are functioning more adaptively today than they were before the ban was passed. While reports of assaults by youth against peers have increased, evidence from several sources indicates that this trend is largely a result of an anti-bullying campaign that has resulted in zero-tolerance policies in Swedish schools. Youth involvement in theft and narcotics crimes has decreased since the 1970s, as have alcohol and drug use; continuing drug use among 15- to 16-year-olds is virtually non-existent. Suicide rates among youth have also declined since 1970.

It is important to note that direct causal relationships cannot be drawn between the passage of the corporal punishment ban and the trends reported here. A multitude of social forces interact to shape the well-being of any particular society and its children. However, a range of evidence indicates that the ban has not had negative effects. Parents have not been criminalised for minor infractions; the social authorities have not become more coercive, and youth have not become unruly. While social problems continue to exist in Sweden, the measures proposed in 1979 by the Children's Rights Commission to combat some of them can certainly be deemed successful.

## Appendix: Data Collection

The research findings presented here are based on data collected from three sources. First, a series of interviews was conducted to provide an understanding of the history, context, and implementation of the corporal punishment ban. Individuals interviewed included:

- the former Chair and a former member of the Children's Rights Commission which proposed the ban;
  - the Administrative Director of and the Legal Adviser to the Office of the Children's Ombudsman;
  - two prosecuting attorneys and a legal scholar;
  - the First Secretary of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs;
  - the Director of the Department of Paediatrics at a University Hospital, and
  - several child psychiatric social workers, well-baby clinic nurses, and academics working in the areas of violence against children and children in care.
- a Detective Inspector with the National Criminal Investigation Department who investigates child abuse reports;
  - a District Court Judge;
  - the Vice-Prosecutor-General;
  - a criminologist and expert in youth violence at Stockholm University, and
  - a social worker and child abuse expert at the National Board of Health and Welfare.

Second, primary data were collected from:

- Statistics Sweden (Statistiska Centralbyrån: SCB);
- the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen);
- the National Crime Prevention Council (Brottsförebyggande rådet: BRÅ);
- the Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (Centralförbundet för alkohol- och narkotikaupplysning: CAN);
- the National Institute of Public Health (Folkhälsoinstitutet: FHI), and
- the Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (Centrum för suicidforskning och prevention: CSP).

To ensure the accuracy of translations and interpretations of the most complex data, personal interviews were conducted with the Principal Research Officer at BRÅ and the researcher responsible for the collection of child welfare statistics at SCB.

Third, interviews were conducted with several experts to obtain background information on socio-cultural shifts, legislative reforms, and criminal procedures which contextualised trends found in the data. These individuals were:

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