

Child maltreatment – our common responsibility

ESSOP MAASTRICHT
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Child abuse in industrialised countries

Self-reported:

- 5 – 35 % of all children in different countries report severe corp. punishment at home
- 4 – 9 % severe psychological abuse and one in three severe offences (particularly in Eastern Europe).
- Sexual exploitation 15 – 30 % of girls and 5 -15 % of boys, whereof 1/3 are penetrations.
- 1,5 – 15 % severe neglect
- 8 – 25 % family violence

Known risk factors:

- Weak economy and low level of parental education
- Economic inequality particularly increases the risk for mortal abuse
- Ethnic factors are mainly explained by socio-economic background factors
- Drug problems increase the risk for family violence.
- About 10 % of the risk is explained by the social position and “climate” in the neighbourhood

Gilbert, Widom, Browne, Ferguson, Webb, Janson. Burden and consequences of child maltreatment in high income countries. **Lancet 2009**

The long-term consequences of Child Abuse

Strong connection to:

- Behaviour problems
- PTSD
- Criminality
- Obesity!

A certain connection with:

- Low educational performance and unskilled work
- Depression and suicide attempts
- Alcohol problems
- Prostitution

Weak or uncertain connection to:

- Self inflicted injuries
- Drug abuse
- Teen age pregnancy
- Chronic pain as adult
- General bad health or quality of life as adult

Children's Rights

UN Convention of the Rights of the Child
(Articles 5, 18 and 19)

Revised European Social charter (article
16: promote economic, legal and social
protection of the child)

National Corporal Punishment bans

Important Swedish lawmaking to prevent corporal punishment

- **1858** prohibited to beat grown up servants
- **1920** prohibited to beat all servants, children included
- **1928** corporal punishment of pupils prohibited in higher education
- **1957** corporal punishment legally equalised to cruelty
- **1958** corporal punishment prohibited in all schools
- **1966** corporal punishment abolished as a method of upbringing of children in the Swedish Parental Act
- **1979** Corporal punishment of children prohibited by the Swedish Parental Act
- **1982** Corporal punishment of children incorporated under public prosecution
- **1990** Sweden ratifies the UNCRC.

The Swedish Corporal Punishment Ban 1979

The Swedish Parental Act Chapter 6 § 1:
Children have the right to care, safety and a good upbringing. Children should be treated with respect for its person and individuality and shall not be exposed to corporal punishment or any other insult (humiliation).

30 countries with Corporal Punishment Ban; October 2011

Europe (22 countries)

- Sweden 1979
- Finland 1983
- Norway 1987
- Austria 1989
- Cyprus 1994
- Denmark 1997
- Latvia 1998
- Croatia 1998
- Germany 2000
- Bulgaria 2000
- Island 2003
- Ukraine 2003
- Hungary 2004
- Rumania 2004
- Greece 2006
- Holland 2007
- Portugal 2007
- Spain 2007
- Liechtenstein 2008
- Luxemburg 2008
- Moldavia 2009
- Poland 2010

Middle East

- Israel 2000

Latin America

- Uruguay 2007
- Venezuela 2007
- Costa Rica 2008

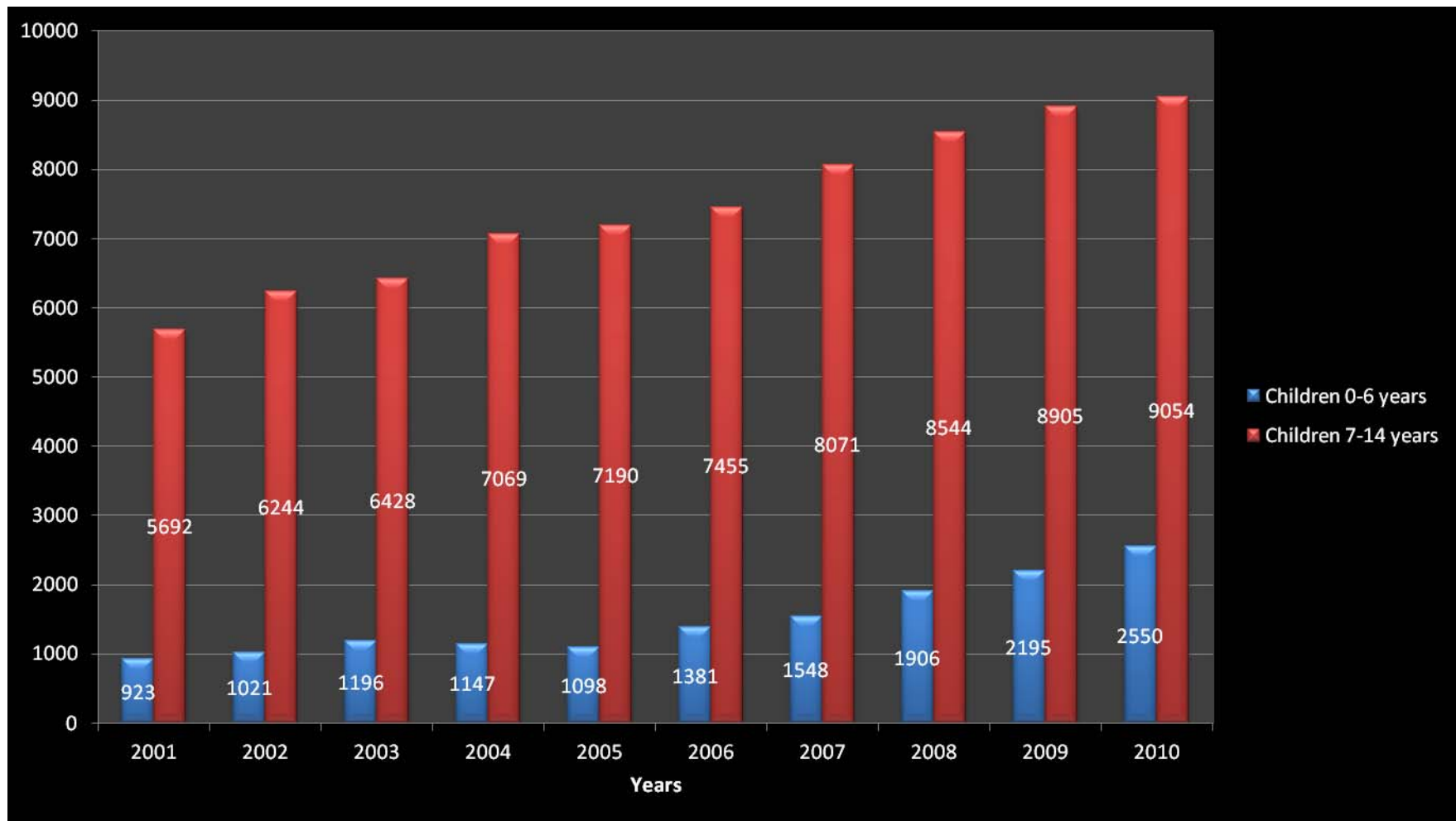
Oceania

- New Zealand 2007

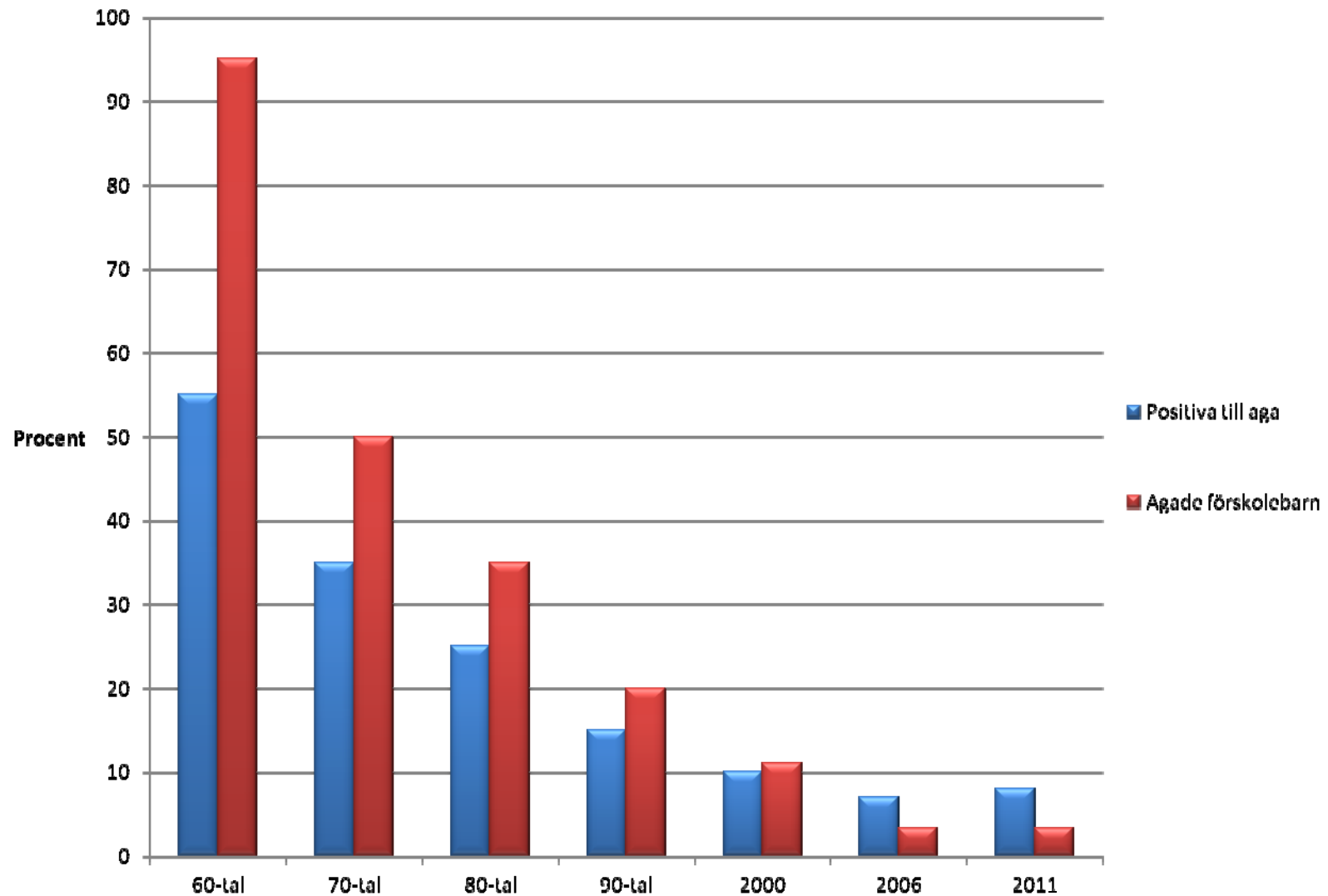
Africa

- Tunisia 2010
- Kenya 2010
- South Sudan 2011

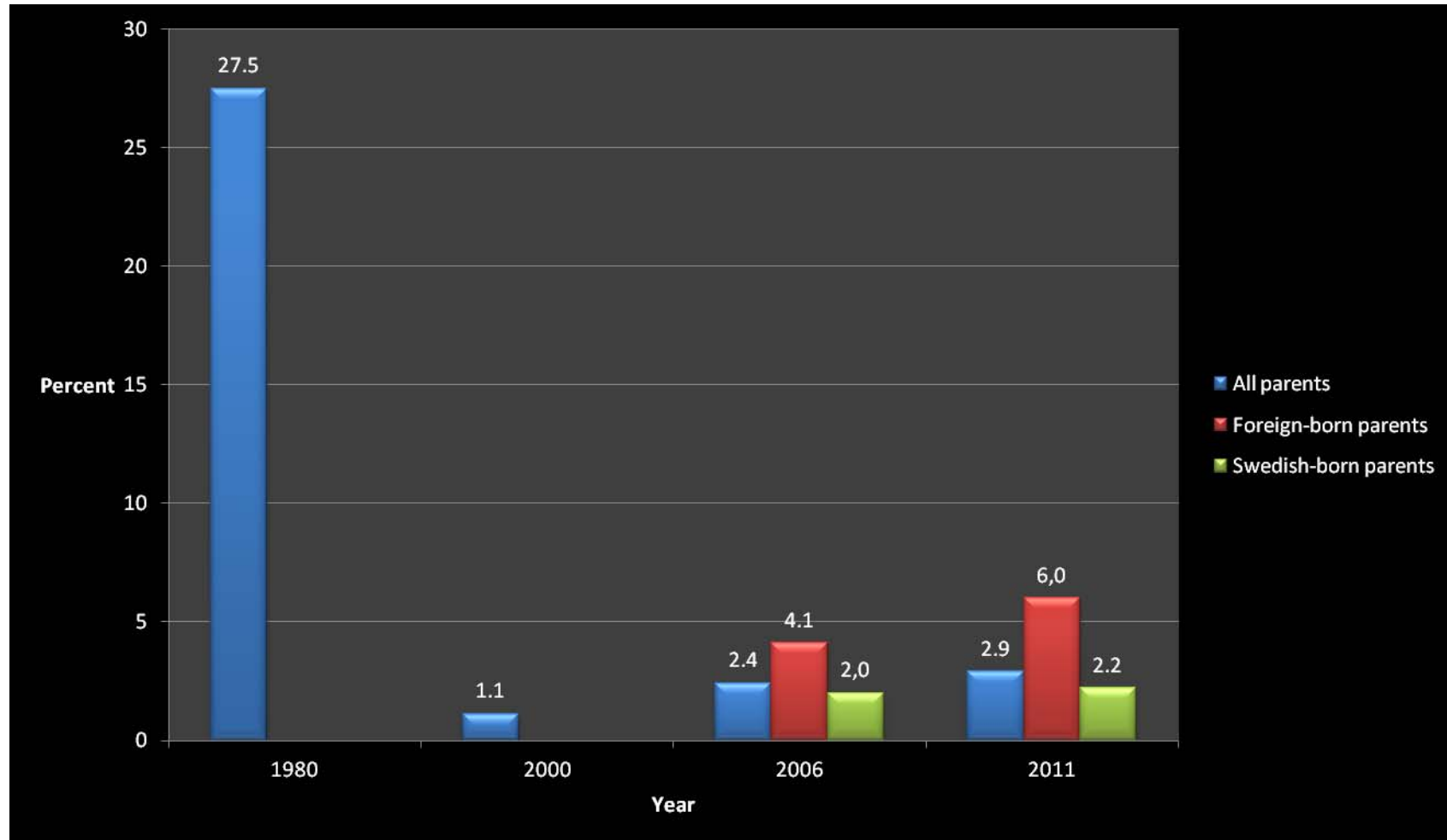
Number of police reported cases of child abuse in Sweden



Attitudes to and Corporal punishment of Swedish pre-school children 1960-2011 (parental reports)



Sweden: Parental reports of corporal punishment of children 0-12 years, the preceding year



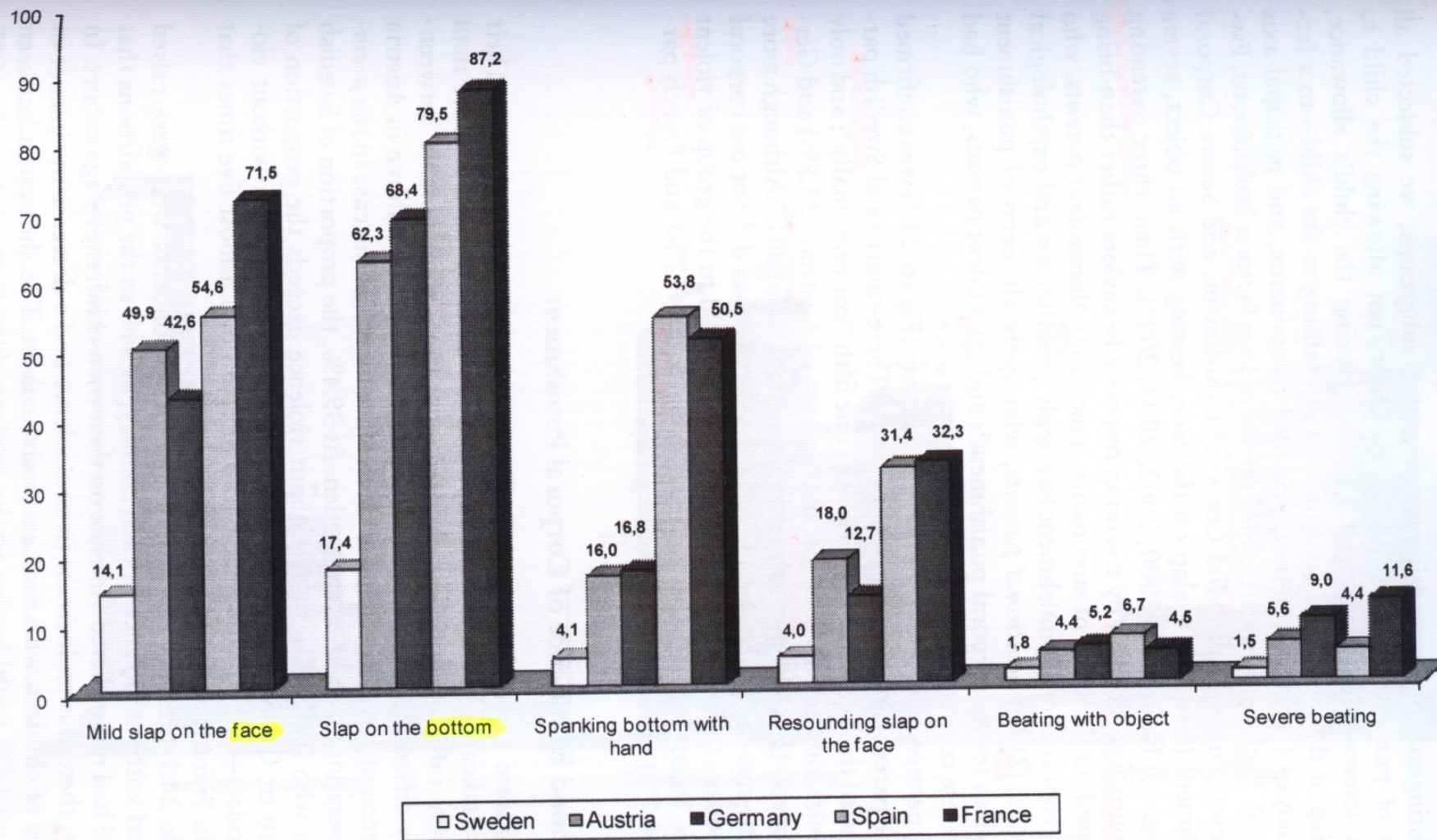
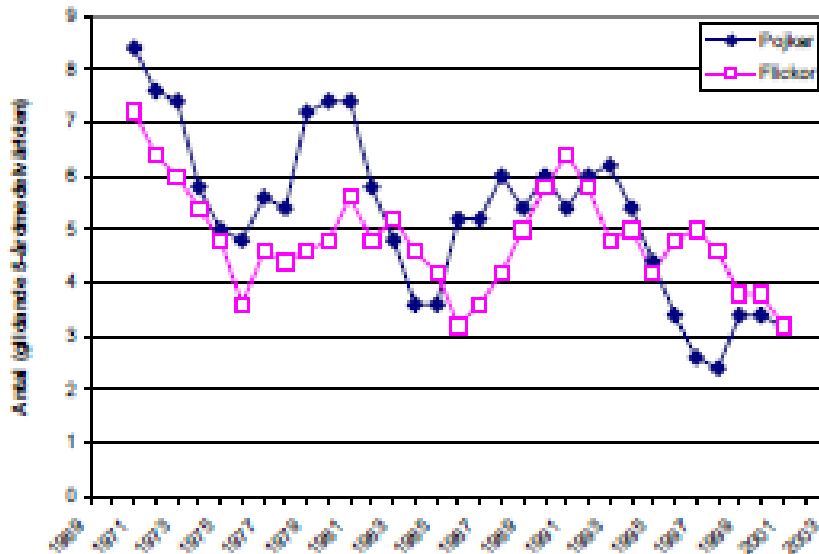


Figure 24.1 Percentages of parents who had used different forms of corporal punishment.

Death of Swedish children 0 -17 years, due to assault 1970-2003

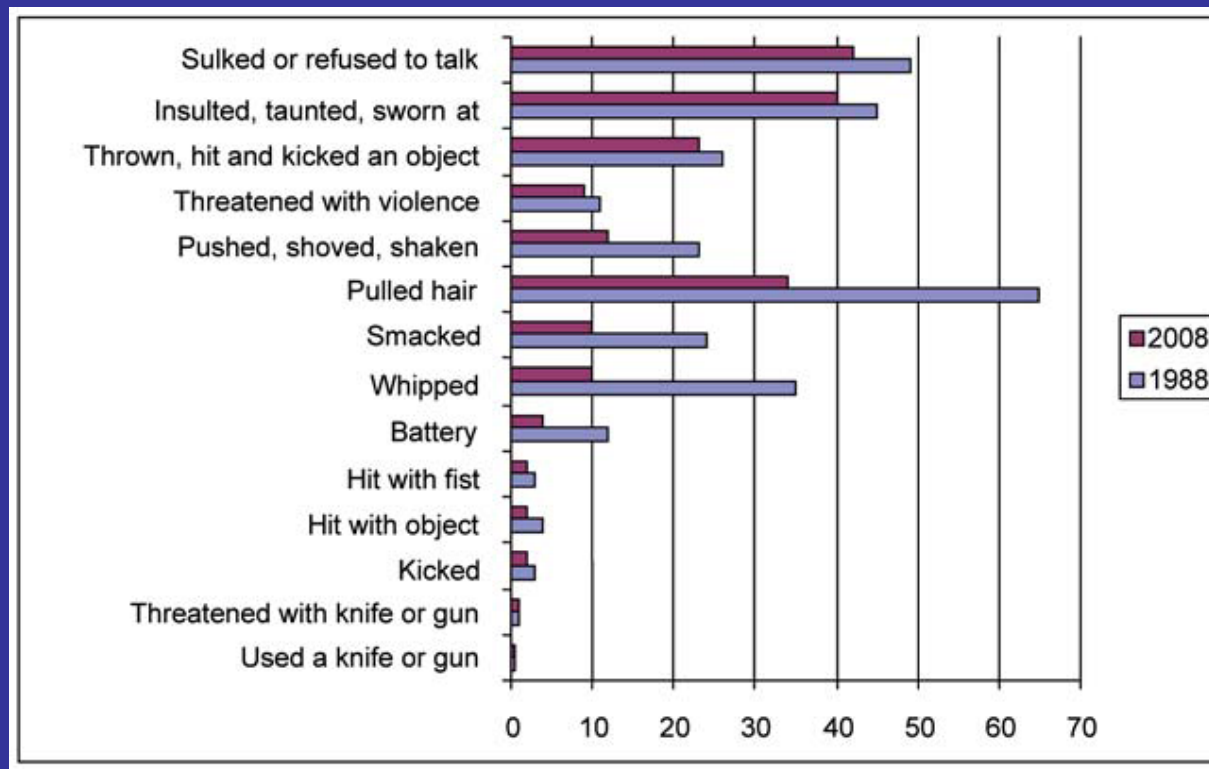


Figur 1 Antal barn 0-17 år, som avlidit till följd av övergrepp av annan person 1970-2003, efter kön. Giltande 5-årsmedelvärden.

2004 – 2010: further down ~ 4 cases/year



Questionnaire to finnish school-children 15-16 y in 1988 and 2008



Noora Ellonen, Juha Kärriäinen, Venla Salmi, Heikki Sariola 2008

Norway 2006: Q on Corporal Punishment pupils 18 – 19 y.

- 7033 pupils (response rate 77 %) 67 schools
- Ever beaten by mother or father = girls 20 %, boys 14 %.
- Often beaten (> 10 times) = 2 %, boys and girls alike.
- Higher risk for severe assaults among immigrant children (x 3 european parents) and x 4 parents born outside Europe).
- 3 x risk families with weak economy, x 3 alcohol, drugs
- (SveinMossige, Kari Stefansen (red.) Vold og overgrep mot barn og unge. Norsk institut for forskning om oppvekst, velfred og aldring Rapport 20/07)

Denmark

- Report to UN 2000: 12 % of children beaten at home repeatedly, 22 % beaten on fingers repeatedly.
- Representative school study 2002 > 6000 pupils 15 y: 10 % any violence last year, girls mainly at home boys 2/3 outside home (Hellweg- Larsen , Böving Larsen 2006)

What about other western countries

- Data from USA, England and Germany indicates a decrease of corporal punishment since 1990.
- USA 1990 - 2004:
 - Sexually abused children: down ~ 50 %
 - Child Abuse: down ~ 40 %
 - Family violence: down ~ 50 %

Plausible explanations: lower unemployment, generally better economy, higher educational level, changed attitudes, better service for parents with psychiatric diseases, more active social intervention (*Finkelhor, Jones: Why have child maltreatment and child victimization declined. J Social Issues 2006;62(4):685-716*)

Plausible explanations for the development in the Nordic countries

- The welfare state, technical development making life easier.
- Early political consensus, early protective legislation.
- Early high educational level of the population
- High awareness of the importance of socio-economic factors – economic equality.
- The unique position of the individual rather than the family.
- Preventive health care for all, parental education (?).
- Comparably economic gender equity.
- The majority of the children early in the “public space” (pre-schools).
- Increased understanding of the connection between family violence and child abuse.

The effects of corporal punishment

How do “normal” Swedish Parents solve conflicts with their children?

- Distract
- Make jokes
- Support good behaviour
- Calm down and comforts the child
- Do not insult consciously
- Hug the child to make it able to listen

Disability is not a protection against abuse – it increases the risk!

- Increased vulnerability due to:
 - increased isolation, weaker social networks
 - increased dependency
 - Less control over the own body
 - less risk for discovery
 - Behavior understood as provoking
 - Indications of abuse misjudged as consequences of the disability
- Children with disabilities are less listened to directly, less believed.
- Increased parental stress
- Staff in health care and social service have easier to identify themselves with adults than with children.

How can we help to make life better for our children?

- Advocacy for Children's rights and welfare.
- Realize where the risks are highest
- Increase discovery of abuse and neglect – give children opportunity to talk!
- Make interventions focused on the child's life circumstances.
- Work for gender equity and "empower" disprivileged mothers.
- Use existing well functioning social networks (neighbourhood, schools etc.
- Work with "evidence based" methods, which are defensible from a child rights perspective.

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