

# Summary

The TV documentary “Stulen Barndom” (Stolen Childhood) was broadcast on Swedish television in November 2005. It featured six middle-aged men talking about the time they spent as children at a Swedish children’s home. They recounted tales of systematic abuse, violence and sexual assault. This was the prelude to a process which resulted in the appointment in 2006 of the Inquiry on Child Abuse and Neglect in Institutions and Foster Homes. The Inquiry was given the task of interviewing people who felt they had suffered neglect during their time in the care of the Swedish social childcare services. A total of 1 030 people applied to be interviewed before the final date for applications on 1 March 2009. The last interviews will be held at the end of February 2011. According to its terms of reference, the Inquiry shall also write a report and propose how similar circumstances can be avoided in the future.

## **Inadequate supervision and monitoring**

As of December 2009, over 600 interviews have already been conducted and almost as many people are still waiting to be interviewed. The results of the first 404 interviews are presented in this interim report. To sum up, it can be ascertained that the Swedish social childcare services have failed in their supervision and monitoring responsibilities during the period of time covered by the Inquiry.

The Inquiry has met people who have told stories of neglect and abuse during their time in Swedish foster homes or institutions. Examples include children who have been permanently hungry, had their human rights violated by foster parents or institution staff, been subjected to both emotional and physical abuse, not received adequate schooling due to being forced into hard labour or been deprived of contact with their biological families.

It should be pointed out, however, that the Inquiry is not representative of how children in care have been treated in general during their placement.

### **Structure and content of the interim report**

The report begins in Chapter 1 with a description of the Inquiry's task and content. Chapters 2 and 4 provide background knowledge. Chapter 3 presents a review of how other countries have dealt with the issue of abuse and neglect in the social childcare services. The Inquiry's methodology and sources are presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

The results of the interviews are reported in Chapter 7. The testimonies of the interviewees are then supplemented with a chapter on the legal regulations governing supervision and what the interviewees themselves remember about it. Together with the Inquiry's review of childcare and social services files, supervision is presented in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 reproduces the comments made by interviewees as regards how their lives have turned out, how they survived the maltreatment they suffered and how society could have acted differently.

The report ends with two more chapters. Chapter 10 features a source-critical discussion about memory and the investigator's proposals and reflections are presented in Chapter 11.

### **The Inquiry's framework**

According to its terms of reference, the Inquiry is to examine serious abuse and maltreatment at institutions and foster homes within the Swedish social childcare services. The Inquiry is to invite people to interview and where appropriate offer psychological support and help to order archive material. Staff at institutions and foster homes who have witnessed neglect should also be invited to interview. Historically, the Inquiry covers all those who are still alive and is restricted in the future by the statutory limitation periods governing any crimes that may have been committed. These differ depending on the type of crime.

The report shall also examine whether "maltreatment and abuse have differed for girls and boys depending on, for example, age,

ethnic background or disability”.<sup>1</sup> The terms of reference also focus on the perspective of redress. “The aim of the inquiry is to produce a report that provides both redress for the victims and lessons for the future.”<sup>2</sup> The information gathered by the Inquiry on individuals’ personal circumstances is confidential in accordance with Section 3 of the Swedish Secrecy Ordinance.

Participation in interviews must be entirely voluntary on the part of the interviewees and the Inquiry may not actively seek out interview subjects as part of its task.

The assignment does not include consideration of any accountability issues in individual cases nor the issue of compensation to the victims.

More information on the Inquiry’s task, composition, delimitations and information measures can be found in Chapter 1, *The background, task, organisation and delimitations of the Inquiry*.

### **Childcare legislation governing supervision and accountability**

In order to put the results of the Inquiry into a wider context, we feel it is important to outline the laws and regulations that were in force during the different time periods. The maltreatment described by the interviewees has taken place throughout most of the twentieth century. The Inquiry is of the opinion that differences in legislation and values pertaining to child-rearing during the different time periods are not relevant to the task of documenting and registering maltreatment. It is, however, appropriate to present the applicable regulations concerning accountability and supervision for foster children and children in institutions.

During the period analysed by the Inquiry, three different laws applied: the Child Welfare Act of 1924; the 1960 Child and Young Persons Act and the Social Services Act of 1980 with special provisions for the care of children and young persons, known as LVU.

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<sup>1</sup>Inquiry Terms of Reference (Dir. 2006:75, p. 5.)

<sup>2</sup>Inquiry Terms of Reference (Dir. 2006:75, p. 5.)

*Division of responsibility between the municipality placing a child into care and the municipality of residence*

Since children are often placed into care outside their home municipality, it appears appropriate to examine which municipality is responsible for supervision.<sup>3</sup>

It has been possible for several social and childcare committees to be involved in the placement of a child, both the home municipality, which took the child into care in the first place, and the municipality of residence, where the child lived during his or her placement.

The Inquiry has studied both statutory texts and manuals to clarify the respective responsibilities of the home municipality and the municipality of residence. In summary, it can be said that the childcare committees of the municipality of residence had an overarching responsibility for the supervision of children placed in care until the introduction of the 1980 Social Services Act, whereupon the responsibility was transferred to the home municipality's social committee. The municipality of residence continued to bear some responsibility for ensuring that the foster homes it used were suitable. From 1940 onwards, Stockholm, and to begin with Malmö, had their own inspectors who checked on children placed in care in other municipalities. In other words, Stockholm has always been responsible for the supervision of the children it has placed in care.

*Age limits for children placed in care*

The age limits have differed depending on the reason for and the type of placement. As new legislation has replaced old laws and regulations, the age limits for children placed in care have been changed.

The Child Welfare Act of 1924 applied to children under 16 as long as they had not been taken into care because they were

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<sup>3</sup>Here the Inquiry sees the concept of supervision in a wider context that includes the County Administrative Board's supervision responsibilities for both individuals and activities, the National Board of Health and Welfare's supervision responsibility and the home municipality's social services/social childcare services responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the placement of the individual child.

“delinquent”.<sup>4</sup> Such adolescents could then be under the control of the social childcare services until they were 18.

With the advent of the 1960 Child and Young Persons Act, foster children could be under the supervision of the childcare committee until they were 19 years old. The childcare institutions were for children under the age of 18. Young people could be kept in youth custody centres until they reached the age of 21.

Since the Social Services Act and LVU came into force in 1982, children and young persons taken into care because of substandard living conditions in the home must be taken out of care when they reach the age of 18. Children and young persons taken into care because of their own behaviour can be kept in care for longer. Since 1985, care under the abovementioned special provisions (LTU) may continue until the young person in question has reached the age of 21.

### *Permission to care for other people's children*

The rules governing permission to care for other people's children have also changed over time.

Before 1945, no prior authorisation or license was required in Sweden to be a foster parent or run a foster home. A foster home that took in children under 12 months old was subject to approval by the childcare committee before a child was placed there. Not until 1960 was a license required to foster children of all ages. Instead of a license, foster parents previously had an “obligation to notify”, i.e. they were obliged to notify the childcare committee in their municipality of residence that they had taken in a foster child.

A license requirement for childcare institutions was introduced in 1931. Permits to set up childcare institutions, later referred to as “homes for care and residence”, have at various stages been issued by county administrative boards and the National Board of Health and Welfare. The county administrative boards have had this responsibility under the 1924 Child Welfare Act and the 1980 Social Services Act. An amendment to the 1924 Act in 1945 transferred the responsibility to the National Board of Health and Welfare, however. This amendment applied until 1982 when the Social Services Act came into force.

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<sup>4</sup>A somewhat outdated expression corresponding to young people who are nowadays taken into care because of their behaviour.

Chapter 2, Legal regulations governing social childcare services, provides a general outline of the amendments made to childcare legislation in Sweden and the rules governing care in foster homes and institutions.

### International perspectives

Sweden is not alone in having appointed inquiries into maltreatment in the social childcare services.

In order to put the Swedish investigation into perspective, the Inquiry has given an account of how three Nordic countries (Norway, Iceland and Denmark) have dealt with the issue of abuse and neglect in the social childcare services. We have concentrated on Norwegian experiences since several inquiries of this nature have been conducted in Norway and the experiences of the first inquiry in Bergen influenced both the terms of reference for and the design of our inquiry.

Inquiries conducted in Ireland, Wales, Australia and Canada are also described. The Australian and Canadian inquiries referred to have primarily focused on children from the countries' indigenous populations. Another inquiry employing similar working methods has taken place in Australia, although this receives only a brief mention in the section on international perspectives.

A few inquiries were tasked to scrutinise a number of named institutions whilst others have invited all those willing to do so to describe their experiences. Some inquiries wanted to look into both positive and negative experiences. Others, like the Swedish inquiry, have focused on abuse and neglect.

#### *Similarities between the inquiries*

There are several similarities between the inquiries held so far into the failures in care and into perpetrated abuse. The inquiries have been instigated as a result of victims starting to come forward in the media and talk about the maltreatment they suffered. The governments of the respective countries have then appointed inquiries and given them more or less the same task; to examine whether, over a given time period, abuse and neglect have occurred in the municipal and/or national childcare services.

Another common experience in the various countries is a strong desire from those interviewed for someone to officially take responsibility for the maltreatment they suffered. The interviewees have demanded an official apology. Such an apology has in several cases been forthcoming in the form of the prime minister or similarly important public figure saying sorry to the victims at an official ceremony. In some countries, an apology was given at an early stage in the inquiry process.

All the inquiries have gathered information from interviews with victims.

### *Norway*

In Norway, it was the municipalities that first began to scrutinise their children's homes. Bergen was the first municipality to officially request the appointment of an independent review committee. Thereafter, over one hundred municipalities have taken the decision to establish "legislation for redress", with rules governing compensation to victims of abuse at various children's and young persons' institutions.

In 2003, the Norwegian Government appointed a national inquiry, which focused its investigation on placements in institutions between 1945 and 1980. The inquiry established that there had been failures in care and that cases of serious abuse had indeed occurred. These had been perpetrated in children's homes, boarding schools and special needs schools throughout the period under scrutiny.

### *Ireland*

A documentary entitled "*States of Fear*" appeared on Irish television in the late 1990s. It described the maltreatment of children at children's homes (known as "industrial schools") run mostly by the Roman Catholic Church. The documentary received a huge amount of media attention.

On 11 May 1999 the Irish prime minister made a public apology to the victims for the distress they had suffered.

As a result of this apology, *the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* (CICA) was set up, tasked with collecting statements from

those who felt they had been abused at the hands of the childcare services.

After nine years of work, the Commission's report was published in May 2009. The first few lines in the conclusions can be seen as a rubric for their findings. "Physical and emotional abuse and neglect were features of the institutions."

In 2002, the *Residential Institutions Redress Board* (RB) was formed with the task of administering financial compensation to the victims. December 2005 was the last month victims could apply for compensation, by which time RB had received 14 584 applications.

### *Australia*

Australia appointed a commission with the task of looking into the abuse and compulsory taking into care of children from indigenous Australian communities. The commission received testimonies from 535 indigenous Australians. The Australian prime minister, Kevin Rudd, made a public apology to the indigenous Australian population in February 2008. The Australian government took full responsibility for the abuse and maltreatment suffered by indigenous Australians at the hands of decision-makers and people in authority on different levels over a long period of time.

On 16 November 2009, the same prime minister apologised for the injustices suffered by "the forgotten Australians" and British children sent to children's homes and institutions in Australia between 1930 and 1970.

More information on the inquiries and compensation systems of these countries can be found in Chapter 3, "Other inquiries around the world. This chapter also includes summaries of the inquiries in Denmark, Wales, Canada and Iceland.

### **Corporal and other forms of punishment from a historical perspective**

To supplement the section on the development of childcare legislation, some historical background is given as to when various forms of punishment and abuse transgressed the bounds of acceptable behaviour and were hence prohibited by law.

*Corporal punishment prohibited in the social childcare services since 1942*

A review of the legislation shows that all the corporal punishment witnessed by interviewees at remand homes/youth custody centres lacked legal support after 1946.

Those who were given corporal punishment at childcare institutions after 1948 were subjected to treatment which the National Board of Health and Welfare had explicitly forbidden.

All corporal punishment at youth custody centres and other childcare institutions was made illegal by law after 1960.

Interviewees who have testified that they received corporal punishment by the childcare committee after 1942 were subject to treatment that lacked legal support. The same is true of children who had to endure corporal punishment in foster homes after 1966.

Children who received lighter corporal punishment in foster homes after 1979 were subjected to criminal acts.

Acts and regulations applicable to remand homes and youth custody centres show that punishments have indeed been permitted but it has always been explicitly stated that such punishments must not be detrimental to young people's health.

Curtailement or withdrawal of meals has never been a permitted means of educating children.

Isolation has been sanctioned in statutes and laws, although always strictly regulated. Six days has been the longest period of isolation allowed but this time period has been reduced in more recent legislation. From 1946, the maximum time period a young person could be kept isolated was three days (72 hours). Since the special provisions for children and young persons (LVU) were revised in 1990, young people cannot be kept isolated for more than 24 hours.

As regards children placed in children's homes, the National Board of Health and Welfare prohibited various forms of punishment and reprimand in 1948. Subjecting children in homes to corporal punishment was expressly forbidden thereafter.

At children's homes, the isolation, cold or enforced showering of children and the withdrawal of meals or use of force-feeding were also prohibited after 1948. Such treatment was unacceptable even though it wasn't criminal in a legal sense. Isolation at children's homes has been regulated by law since 1960. Children

over the age of 15 who have been kept in isolation for longer than 3 days at children's homes have been subjected to unacceptable treatment.

Most of the cases of sexual abuse of children that took place during the time period studied by the Inquiry were criminal acts. In time, more acts have come to be seen as punishable. Such an act is the production and dissemination of child pornography, which was classified as a crime in 1980. The possession of such material was also criminalised in 1999.

Chapter 4, Maltreatment from a historical perspective, presents the legislation and provisions that have regulated physical abuse, sexual abuse and various punishments of children in care during the twentieth century.

### Choice of methods and sources

Most of the information about maltreatment has been collected via interviews. An interview guide has been developed in order to narrow down relevant question areas. The majority of interviews have been held in the Inquiry's offices in Stockholm. About one third of them have been conducted at hotels in Göteborg or in Malmö. In cases where interviewees were persons with disabilities or for some other reason were not able to travel, the interviews were conducted at their homes. Telephone interviews have been avoided as much as possible.

The Inquiry has invited interviewees to look for archive documents if they hadn't already done so at the time of interview. They were also asked for their consent to allow the Inquiry to view the archive material. In this interim report, archive material from 29 people has been used to compile data on supervision from a random sample.

### *The Inquiry's definition of maltreatment*

Since the beginning of the 1960s, several attempts have been made both nationally and internationally to provide a scientific definition of *maltreatment, abuse and neglect* of children. To start with, the definitions mainly focused on physical maltreatment. Gradually,

the concept has been widened to include the emotional needs of the child.

The definition of maltreatment used by the Inquiry is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The treatment of an individual child that in some way deviates from the rights laid down in the Convention is defined as maltreatment by the Inquiry. The rights of the child have been operationalised and categorised for each interviewee. The structure used by the Inquiry separates maltreatment into two groups, *neglect and abuse*.

*Neglect* is divided into: inadequate care in the foster homes/institutions; inadequate supervision by foster parents or institution staff and lack of schooling.

*Abuse* is divided into: physical/emotional abuse and sexual abuse.

The Inquiry has not found it relevant to make a definite distinction between physical and emotional abuse despite several attempts to do so, the point being that all abuse includes some form of emotional humiliation.

*Physical/emotional abuse* is divided into: physical violence with a weapon; other physical violence; harmful coercion, rules and punishments; threats and threatening situations; violation of integrity; discrimination and injustices.

*Sexual abuse* is divided into “hands-on” abuse, i.e. touching/penetration of the victim, and “hands-off” abuse, where the victim is not physically touched.

A detailed description of the concept of maltreatment and definitions of the eight main categories used by the Inquiry when compiling results can be found in Chapter 5, What is maltreatment? Chapter 6, Sources - interviews and archive documents, describes the interviews and the Inquiry’s working method in more detail.

### **Composition of the interview group**

The testimonies of 404 people about maltreatment and abuse are included in this report. 225 of these are women and 179 are men. One of the 404 people, one has had a sex-change as an adult. 71 people have said that they belong to a Swedish minority or have a foreign background. five people have said they had disabilities as children.

The Inquiry has interviewed people of a variety of ages. In practice, people placed in care from the 1920s until the late 1990s have been interviewed by the Inquiry. The oldest subject was 86 years old at the time of interview and the youngest was 21. The largest group were born in the 1950s, followed by those born in the 1940s. The number of interview subjects born in the 1960s is less than half those born in the 1940s. Few people were interviewed at either end of the age scale. Most of those interviewed were placed in several foster homes/institutions as children. In total, the 404 interviewees have described 1 403 placements. The average, calculated as the median, is four placements. The interviewees did not say that they had been subject to maltreatment at all the foster homes/institutions they had lived at, but many were mistreated at more than one.

### **Neglect and violations of integrity are common**

A substantial majority of the interviewees (87 percent) have said that they were subject to neglect. The commonest forms of abuse were violations of integrity and other physical violence. All the general categories of maltreatment apart from physical violence with a weapon and threats have affected more than half of all the interviewees.

Persons of a different ethnic background are slightly overrepresented when it comes to violations of integrity in the verbal abuse category.

Sexual abuse is the only category in which women have been considerably more affected than men.

Younger people have reported slightly more threats and threatening situations than older people.

### *Identified perpetrators*

The perpetrators identified in the interviewees' testimonies have mainly been foster parents and institution staff. This is in itself not surprising since children have been placed in foster homes more often than in institutions.

Remarkably, however, representatives of the social childcare services have also been identified several times as perpetrators in

most of the maltreatment categories. They have been reported mostly regarding neglect and violations of integrity.

Reported maltreatment by foster mothers is mostly in the form of physically and/or emotionally damaging coercion/rules/punishments.

The foster father is often reported as the perpetrator of violence with a weapon.

#### *Maltreatment in foster homes versus institutions*

Of the 404 interviewees, 85 percent reported abuse and neglect in foster homes. 62 percent talked of abuse and neglect in institutions and 12 percent in other placements.

The type of maltreatment that has only occurred in foster homes is bizarre maltreatment, a form of physical and/or emotionally damaging coercion, rules and punishments of a rather absurd nature. The maltreatment mainly reported from foster homes is mostly in the form of labour exploitation, violation of integrity and sexual abuse.

Other forms of coercion, rules and punishments, such as false imprisonment and hard labour have been reported more from institutions than foster homes, as is the case with other types of physical violence such as bullying and cold-showering. An initial impression seems to be that maltreatment has mainly occurred in foster homes. This may depend on which people the Inquiry has managed to reach. Research has shown that children and young persons who have been placed in correctional institutions, such as youth custody centres, have higher rates of excess mortality and social exclusion than children taken into other types of care. The results can consequently depend to a certain extent on who has been able to take part in the Inquiry's interviews.

#### *Accounts from the same foster home/institution*

There are 13 foster homes that appear in more than one interviewee's testimony. In ten of these 13 cases, it is a question of siblings being placed at the same foster home. 72 institutions appear in more than one testimony.

*Brief overview of the results*

A brief review of the results from the eight main categories of maltreatment distinguished by the Inquiry is given below:

1. Neglect
2. Physical violence with a weapon
3. Other physical violence
4. Threats and threatening situations
5. Labour exploitation
6. Violation of integrity, discrimination and injustices
7. Sexual abuse
8. Physically and/or emotionally damaging coercion/rules/punishments

The results of all 404 interviews are compiled in Chapter 7, Neglect and abuse - results. Unabridged information in tabular form is available in pdf format on the Inquiry's website.

*Neglect*

Just under 90 percent of those interviewed have spoken of being subjected to some form of neglect. This does not necessarily mean that ten percent have not been subjected to neglect, merely that this has not been stressed during interview. Neglect is by far the most frequently occurring category in the material compiled by the Inquiry.

Neglect is divided into three sub-categories of maltreatment:

1. Inadequate care in the foster home/institution, for example neglected medical care/dental care, poor clothing, substandard hygiene, expenditure fraud, substandard living conditions and insufficient diet.
2. Inadequate supervision by foster parents or institution staff, for example being in dangerous environments, left unsupervised, drug and alcohol abuse.

3. Inadequate schooling, for example being prevented from doing schoolwork, being denied compulsory schooling.

More neglect has been reported from foster homes than from institutions. Identified perpetrators have mostly been foster parents and institution staff members. Remarkably, representatives of the social childcare services have also been identified as perpetrators. The neglect category is spread evenly over time. There is no over- or underrepresentation with regard to gender, ethnicity or disability.

#### *Physical violence with a weapon*

This type of maltreatment has been reported both from foster homes and institutions, although more frequently from foster homes.

Almost half of those interviewed have reported being beaten with a weapon. There is no significant difference between men and women in this regard. This is also true for the foreign background group and the ethnic minorities group, including travelling people. They have not been affected more than the rest of the interviewees.

In total, the interviewees give examples of a hundred or so different kinds of weapons used in connection with physical violence. The most common are: birch canes, belts, carpet beaters, brooms, pieces of wood and whips.

Identified perpetrators have mainly been foster parents, institution staff, foster siblings and school staff. Physical violence with a weapon occurred to a greater extent before 1960 than after.

Physical violence with a weapon can be divided into three main categories: Violence for educational purposes, violence under emotional stress and sadistic violence.

#### *Other physical violence*

Just over three-quarters of the interviewees say that they have been subjected to other physical violence.

There is no over- or underrepresentation with regard to gender or ethnicity.

Other physical violence is reported from all the decades covered by the survey with a slightly rising trend for interviewees born in the 1970s.

The most common forms of other violence are being slapped in the face (“boxed round the ears”), lifted or pulled, punched, pushed, thrown, kicked/stamped on and nipped.

Other physical violence has been reported from both foster homes and institutions, with slightly more reports from foster homes. Foster parents and institution staff have been identified as the perpetrators in the vast majority of cases.

In some cases, interviewees have spoken of other physical violence of a life-threatening nature, for example kicks to the head and attempted suffocation.

### *Threats and threatening situations*

About 40 percent of those interviewed have reported being subjected to threats or threatening situations.

The Inquiry distinguishes between nine different types of threats:

1. Threats to life
2. Physical threats
3. Witnessed physical threats to others
4. Witnessed violence against others
5. Threats of castration/sterilisation.
6. Threats of expulsion
7. Ignored fear
8. Religious threats
9. Threats in conjunction with inspections

Threats in conjunction with inspections have mostly been associated with being forced to deny abuse.

Thirty people have described threats to their lives. Firearms, knives, axes, etc., have also been involved in such cases.

Most threats and threatening situations have occurred in foster homes. There is no over- or underrepresentation with regard to

disability or ethnicity. Nearly twice as many women as men have reported witnessing physical violence against others or receiving threats of expulsion. More men than women have reported receiving threats of sterilisation or castration.

The younger people report slightly more threats and threatening situations than the older people.

### *Labour exploitation*

Just over half of those interviewed have spoken about being subjected to hard labour, either in agriculture/forestry, domestic work or some other type of business. For many, the work was heavy and associated with risks and children's education and health were jeopardised and neglected. The number of people subjected to labour exploitation decreased after the 1970s. Foster children were also loaned or rented out to others to do unpaid work.

Labour exploitation occurred mainly in foster homes. Both foster fathers and foster mothers have been identified as perpetrators. Girls were exploited more often than boys in domestic work and boys more than girls in agriculture/forestry. Many women do report, however, that they were exploited and forced to do hard agricultural labour as young girls.

### *Violation of integrity, discrimination and injustices*

Reports of this kind of maltreatment were given in the vast majority of the interviews (86 percent). The maltreatment in this section is presented under 11 headings.

1. Negative discrimination
2. Deprived of/restricted contact with close family
3. Verbal abuse
4. Deprived of cultural/political/religious identity
5. Physical violation of integrity
6. Degrading and unfair treatment
7. Social isolation/restricted freedom of movement

8. Listening in on communication/telephone calls, reading private diaries/post
9. Robbed of possession or animals
10. Incorrect medical diagnosis
11. Coerced abortion/sterilisation

Most of this kind of maltreatment was reported from foster homes. The figures show no significant differences between men and women apart from the fact that women were subjected to more verbal abuse than men.

Persons of a foreign background or belonging to an ethnic minority, such as travelling people, are not over- or underrepresented in relation to the entire group, apart from when it comes to being subjected to verbal abuse.

The identified perpetrators of this category of maltreatment have mainly been foster parents.

### *Sexual abuse*

Just over half of all the interviewees have reported sexual abuse. A greater proportion of women (61 percent) than men (42 percent) spoke of how they were sexually abused.

Identified perpetrators of sexual abuse have mainly been foster fathers, foster mothers, institution staff, foster siblings, other children in care, relatives and acquaintances of the foster families.

More than twice as many interviewees have reported abuse in foster homes compared to details of sexual abuse at institutions.

The occurrence of sexual abuse has not changed over time, according to the data collected from interviewees.

Several different types of sexual abuse have been described; violent or non-violent abuse, abuse with or without physical contact, abuse with or without some form of financial compensation, sexual abuse in combination with various types of threats.

In the vast majority of cases, the interviewees said that as children they had never told anyone about the abuse they suffered. Frequent reasons for this include a feeling of shame and self-accusation or being threatened or being scared of what might have

happened if they had told someone. Several tried to speak up but no-one believed them.

*Physically and/or emotionally harmful coercion/rules/punishments*

About three quarters of the interviewees said they had been subjected to *harmful coercion/rules/punishments*. There is no over- or underrepresentation with regard to gender, ethnicity or disability.

The reporting of this type of maltreatment is relatively constant over the eight decades covered by the Inquiry.

The most commonly occurring categories of *harmful coercion/rules/punishments* described by the interviewees have been: refused food and drink, robbed of possessions, hard labour, collective punishments, forced to eat food/non-food items, being locked in/out.

Particular attention has been devoted to different punishments for wetting the bed.

*Harmful coercion/rules/punishments* have occurred in both foster homes and at institutions.

Some cases of coercion suffered by the interviewees have been described and perceived as so unfathomable and unjustified that the Inquiry has defined them as *absurd*. When a more or less absurd set of rules, often in combination with the control of bodily functions as well as abuse and other neglect, is described as “constantly ongoing” and totally dominated the interviewees’ existence, the situation has been defined by the Inquiry as “*bizarre maltreatment*”. A total of 14 interviewees described how they were subjected to bizarre maltreatment.

Bizarre maltreatment has only taken place in foster homes.

**Mandatory supervision, the testimonies of the interviewees and archive material**

How and whether supervision was carried out and what the mandatory responsibilities of the social childcare services were have been important issues for the Inquiry.

Chapter 8 describes how the authorities should have and did carry out their responsibilities in relation to the interviewees when

they were in care. It has been a question of how supervision should have been implemented in accordance with laws and guidelines, how supervision was practised according to the testimonies of the 404 interviewees and, in 29 cases, according to their childcare and social security files. The chapter also describes the accounts given by interviewees regarding other actions taken by the authorities.

The overall picture is that the social childcare services have failed in their supervision and monitoring responsibilities.

#### *Recommendations have not been followed*

For a very long time, the guideline recommendation has been for foster homes to be inspected at least twice a year. This has not been followed. This is evident from both the testimonies of the interviewees and the archive documents we have studied. Only a few interviewees have talked about regular inspections.

A fifth of them said they didn't receive or can't recall any visits from inspectors. This can be compared to the data that has emerged from the Inquiry's examination of 29 people's childcare and social security files. 13 out of these 29 people had no record of having undergone inspection. Despite the limited number of files studied, this confirms the interviewees' general experience of supervision/inspections.

#### *Other inadequacies of the social childcare services*

The social childcare services have also taken inadequate action in other ways.

The interviewees have criticised the authorities for separating siblings and hindering contact with biological parents. They also accuse them of insensitivity and ignorance when placing children into care and of placing children in unsuitable environments.

Even in cases where the children themselves have reported abuse, the authorities sometimes failed to take action. Most of the maltreatment analysed by the Inquiry occurred within the walls of institutions and foster homes. But it was the responsible social childcare authority, normally the childcare committee, that should have prevented it from happening.

## **The comments of interviewees regarding the impact on their adult lives, survival strategies in childhood and what should have been done differently**

During interview, the investigators asked the interviewees questions about how things turned out for them later in life as regards education, relationships, work, illness, experiences of healthcare and treatment, medication, substance abuse and criminality. A particular question related to suicidal tendencies and attempted suicide. Chapter 9 presents a brief summary of interviewees' comments. This should be seen as a preliminary synopsis. The Inquiry hopes to be able to present a more in-depth description once all the people have been interviewed.

### *Education*

The interviewees have a very wide diversity of educational backgrounds. 315 out of the 404 interviewees have completed compulsory education, sometimes finishing their studies in adult secondary education. However, 80 people never finished their compulsory education (29 in the old elementary school system and 51 in the more recent secondary school system). 106 people have completed upper secondary school and 61 (15 percent) say that they have studied at university or a college of higher education. There was no data on the compulsory schooling of 9 of the interviewees. One person has reported being illiterate.

### *Health*

Just under half of the interviewees state that they are either on sick leave or incapacity benefit. 169 people say that they have worked all their lives. Just under 100 (99 people - 25 percent) say that they suffer from or have had recurrent suicidal tendencies. 16 percent (64 people) have attempted suicide at some point in their lives.

*Criminality and substance abuse*

Thirteen percent of the interviewees have experienced criminality, and 28 percent say that they have or have had alcohol or drug problems.

*Emotional impact of maltreatment*

The interviewees have talked about the emotional difficulties they believe have been caused by the maltreatment. A large proportion describe how they have to live with strong feelings of loneliness. They have found it difficult to relate to others, making close relationships difficult. Many have never spoken of their childhood experiences to anyone. It's not unusual even for an interviewee's partner to have been kept totally in the dark. The reasons for this have been many, but shame has been a recurring factor.

Several of those interviewed have described feelings of shame and guilt that have hounded them throughout their lives. They blame themselves for not managing to forget events in their childhood and in some cases because they weren't able to avoid the maltreatment they were subjected to as children.

Several speak of having lost their childhood. The Inquiry has received accounts of the sorrow and pain involved in growing up without having had the chance to "be a child".

One concept referred to in similar inquiries abroad is "lost opportunities". Many interviewees speak of lost opportunities in most spheres of adult life. The Inquiry has also encountered a single-mindedness in those interviewed. Several have defied many difficulties and reached their family and work goals.

*Survival strategies*

How could the interviewees survive the maltreatment they suffered as children? A surprising number of interviewees have given clear answers to this question.

Many remember and can describe how they as children tried to cope with a more or less unbearable daily existence. Many have described that they coped with their situation by daydreaming, creating fantasy worlds and imaginary friends for themselves, taking things one day at a time, losing themselves in their hobbies

or living in hope. Some have described how they came to realise themselves that something was wrong in the way they were treated. They did not blame themselves for what happened, felt no guilt or shame since it wasn't their fault. This insight was significant and crucial to how they coped with life. It wasn't like this for others, however.

*How could things have been done differently?*

One of the Inquiry's tasks is to contribute experiences so that similar circumstances in the social childcare services can be avoided in the future. Several interviewees have said that this has been one of the strongest reasons for their participation in the inquiry; to ensure other children don't suffer maltreatment, now and in the future.

Many have spoken of their experiences and given their opinions on how the social childcare services/social services could have done things differently. Their suggestions have concerned both what the social childcare services should have done when they were taken in care as children and how the work of the social services can be improved today.

Suggestions included more unannounced inspections and the social worker creating a relationship of trust with the child in care, a relationship that takes the child's rights, wishes and needs into consideration to a greater extent. Furthermore, the importance of education and training for staff and foster parents is emphasised, as is help with establishing contact with the biological family. Several interviewees feel that they could be of use themselves when it comes to placing children in care today. They could be involved and support both the children themselves and the social services.

A detailed description of the interviewees' difficulties and symptoms, survival strategies and suggestions for how society could have acted differently can be found in Chapter 9, Interviewees' comments.

## What can people remember?

The chapter after the results summary takes a critical look at the use of interviews as an information source and discusses what we can remember and what we forget.

The research presented shows that our very first memories are generally from when we are about three and a half years old. It is likely that people forget neutral events, which for different reasons are not coded into our memories from the start or simply get lost along the way because they were not sufficiently interesting or significant.

It is easier to remember recurrent events and traumatic experiences. Studies show that people who have been subjected to abuse as children, in cases where the abuse has been documented, *under-report* when they talk about their childhood as adults.

### *Oral history as a method*

Since we have collected testimonies from the past, we have used oral history, a working method used in historical research. Within oral history, the interview is frequently the most important source, since there is often a lack of written material about the group to be studied. Neglect and abuse have seldom been documented in social journals.

For a more in-depth discussion, see Chapter 10, Source criticism and memory - a discussion.

## Proposals and discussion

In the last chapter of the interim report, the investigator discusses the results and makes a number of proposals. In brief, these proposals centre on a redress process for the victims and suggest that the government should take the initiative to impose sanctions on those who jeopardise the safety of children in social care.

The investigator finishes with a brief recommendation to municipalities and central government: follow the law, apply the existing knowledge in the area and impose sanctions on those who jeopardise the children's safety.

**Proposals:**

The Government should initiate a redress process for the victims that includes:

- acknowledging the failure of Swedish municipalities and authorities to protect children in care from neglect and abuse,
- apologising to the victims,
- taking all the necessary measures to ensure neglect and abuse in the social childcare services never happens again,
- taking measures to ensure full atonement,
- taking measures to rehabilitate the victims

**Inadequate protection from the social childcare services**

Similar results to those now presented in the Swedish review of the social childcare services have been reported in other countries. The tales told from Australia, Ireland, Canada and Norway could easily have been taken from our inquiry.

*Neglect and abuse at the hands of society*

Society, in this case, the municipal childcare committees or equivalent thereof, took care of these children in order to protect them. This was done pursuant to the legislation governing the social childcare services. The failures have been in the practical work done by the authorities, not in the laws, regulations and guidelines.

The interviewees have told the Inquiry that they were subjected to abuse and neglect that was often much worse than the maltreatment they had suffered before being taken into care.

Identified perpetrators in the various cases were often people occupying a position of trust; tasked with taking care of and protecting other people's children, as foster parents or employees. In other words, *these children suffered abuse and neglect at the hands of society*. This is a major ethical and moral distinction compared to crimes committed against the children of private individuals. It

quite obviously represents a failure, above all for the social childcare services; the interviewees were not better protected as children, and their safety was not ensured. This warrants redress from central government and municipalities.

#### *Who is accountable?*

Central government is responsible for legislation, supervision and the running of youth custody centres, etc. County councils have run various social childcare institutions. Municipalities have the main responsibility for approving, commissioning and monitoring foster home care, but have also run institutions and procured services from private institutions.

In conclusion, this all adds up to our society on all levels - locally, regionally and nationally - being accountable for the neglect and abuse described in the interviews.

#### *The redress process*

The fact that the 404 interviewees did not receive the protection from society that they were entitled to when taken into care calls for redress from central government and the municipalities. This should take place through a process that brings redress first and foremost to the victims. This redress process should be coordinated by the Government to ensure it takes on a standardised and dignified form.

#### **How can similar circumstances be avoided in the future?**

The investigator has also been tasked with “documenting the experiences gained from the Inquiry that can help to avoid similar circumstances in the social childcare services in the future”.

The investigator comments on the Child Protection Inquiry’s proposal that the social committee shall appoint an accountable welfare officer for each child taken into care, independent from the responsibility for the foster home or institution. This welfare officer shall be responsible for monitoring the child’s situation and be obliged to visit the child at least four times a year, each time talking to the child in private.

The ministerial memorandum on amendments to the provisions of the Lex Sarah<sup>5</sup> law, which requires all social services employees to report any irregularities, is also commented on by the investigator.

The proposals in both the Child Protection Inquiry and the ministerial memorandum are a step in the right direction, if they lead to better municipal services.

Previously the Inquiry has shown that laws, regulations and guidelines in the area have been sufficient for many decades, but they have not been followed by the social childcare services. This lack of compliance has, however, not led to any sanctions. Why then would municipalities, all of a sudden, start to prioritise the safety of children taken into care?

Stiff sanctions should be introduced so that officials and politicians think twice before jeopardising the safety of children taken into care.

### Closing comments

In conclusion, the investigator would like to thank all the interviewees. Thanks to their courage and determination to tell their stories, sometimes for the first time and under considerable duress, Sweden now has a valuable document that will bear witness to vulnerability and survival and to how bad things can turn out when society makes mistakes. In the time between the start of the Inquiry and the publication of this interim report, five of the interviewees have died.

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<sup>5</sup>Ds 2009:33. *Amendments to the Lex Sarah provisions etc.*