

Law Reform and Corporal Punishment in Sweden:

Response to Robert Larzelere, The Christian Institute and Families First



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Foreword

The Christian Institute and Families First have published a booklet written by Robert Larzelere, University of Nebraska Medical Center. The publishers claim that this booklet presents a “devastating critique” of my research on Sweden’s corporal punishment ban. Throughout the booklet, Larzelere accuses me of bias, claims that my conclusions contradict the evidence, and implies that my research is based more on “good intentions” than on rigorous analysis. This attack on my research goes beyond the level of academic debate and warrants a full response. The purpose of this document is to provide that response.

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Executive Summary

Larzelere suggests that his analysis of the Swedish situation is objective. However:

- his position on corporal punishment is influenced by interpretations of Biblical scripture, a position that could compromise his objectivity,
- his critique reveals a lack of knowledge of Sweden and law reform in that country,
- his conclusions are based on extremely limited sources of data, misuse of the data he does have, and non-validated assumptions about the Swedish system.

1. Larzelere's claim: Because public attitudes shifted prior to the 1979 explicit ban on corporal punishment, the ban has not been effective.

Response: The explicit ban was the last of several law reforms made over a period of 50 years. Public support for corporal punishment has declined with successive reforms. In 1965 – 8 years after the criminal defense to assault was removed from the Penal Code - 53% of Swedes believed that corporal punishment was necessary. By 1994 only 11% of Swedes were positively inclined toward even mild forms of corporal punishment.

2. Larzelere's claim: Physical punishment has not declined over time.

Response: Larzelere examines data collected at one point in time (1994) to draw conclusions about change over time. When studies based on data collected from the 1950's to the 1990's are examined, it is clear that physical punishment has declined dramatically. Whereas all children born in the 1950's were physically punished and 13% were hit with implements, only a minority of those born in 1980 were physically punished, even once or twice. Virtually none of today's youth have been hit with implements.

3. Larzelere's claim: Physical assaults of children have increased.

Response: Larzelere erroneously uses police reporting statistics as if they are rates of actual assault. He fails to recognize that reporting rates are highly vulnerable to changes in legal and cultural definitions of violence. As public sensitivity to violence increases, so do reporting rates. The proportion of total assault reports composed of aggravated assault reports has not increased, indicating that assaults are more likely to be reported, but their severity has not increased. A study by the National Crime Prevention Council supports the conclusion that the increase seen in reporting does not reflect a true increase in violence against children.

4. Larzelere's claim: Swedish child abuse rates were higher than American rates following the 1979 explicit ban.

Response: This claim is based on a single study examining each country at one point in time. The results show that the rate of overall violence and of spanking and slapping were much higher in the American sample than in the Swedish sample. In the case of very severe violence there was no difference between the samples. The proportion of parents committing acts of severe violence was extremely small in both countries, indicating that these deviant individuals are outliers who are unlikely to be amenable to educational initiatives.

5. Larzelere's claim: The difference in child abuse mortality rates before and after the 1979 explicit ban was not statistically significant.

Response: Larzelere fails to recognize the importance of the law reforms that preceded the explicit ban, most notably the removal of the criminal defense to assault in 1957. The annual child abuse mortality rate has been close to zero since 1971. Nine children died this way in the 25 years between 1971 and 1996. In order to decrease further, the rate would have to remain at zero indefinitely, which is impossible.

6. Larzelere's claim: The 1979 corporal punishment ban has caused youth violence to increase.

Response: Larzelere again presents police reporting statistics as if they are rates of actual assault. He does not acknowledge the powerful impact that anti-bullying initiatives have had on reporting of youth assault in Sweden. He misrepresents the conclusions of the Swedish criminologist, Dr. Hanns von Hofer, and does not address the findings of self-report and victimization studies that demonstrate stability in youth violence since 1971.

7. Larzelere's claim: 46% of children in the child welfare system have been removed from their homes.

Response: Accurately stated, of measures implemented for children new to the system in 1995, 46% involved some kind of out-of-home care, a decrease from 60% in 1982. This kind of care includes special measures for young offenders, short-term placements for assessment, and longer term placements. Out-of-home care in Sweden often involves the entire family, not separation of the child from the family. Larzelere's conclusions about the Swedish child welfare system are largely based on a single opinion-based source. His simplistic response to these complex data reveals a lack of knowledge about the system.

8. Larzelere's claim: Children are much more likely to be removed from their homes in Sweden than in other European countries.

Response: Larzelere is basing his claim on 1981 figures. Moreover, he confuses the number of children who were first placed in out-of-home care in a given year with the total number of children who were placed in out-of-home care in that year and who remain in out-of-home care from previous years. His confusion leads to a highly distorted picture of the situation. Whereas he states that 22,000 children were removed from their homes in 1981, the actual number of children placed in out-of-home care in 1982 was 4,839. This number declined by 20% by 1995. Larzelere cites figures from other nations taken from an opinion-based source without any documentation or any explanation of differences in child welfare systems, statistical record-keeping procedures, ages of children included in the system, or other important differences that can greatly distort any apparent differences in rates.

9. Larzelere's claim: *Before other countries follow Sweden's example of a smacking ban, they should consider Sweden's increase in child abuse and criminal assaults.*

Response: The supposed "increase" in violence against children is not, in fact, reality. Moreover, 14 countries have already followed Sweden's example, not because of its irrefutable "success," but because they believe that children should have legal protection from assault. Laws affirming human rights are based on principle, not on evidence. The American law prohibiting assault of adults has been a massive failure, if we measure success by rates of reported violence. But Americans would never consider removing their legal protection from assault because it "hasn't worked." Their law is based on principle. This is the basis of international laws prohibiting corporal punishment.

Summary

Larzelere's critique reflects a misunderstanding of Swedish history, culture and law. He has misinterpreted and misrepresented my analyses, as well as the official data. He is remarkably ill-informed about Sweden, rendering his critique of my research no more than a polemic.

Background

Since receiving his Ph.D. in Psychology from Pennsylvania State University, Larzelere spent 8 years as a tenured Associate Professor at Rosemead School of Psychology at Biola University (formerly the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (<http://www.biola.edu>)). Shortly thereafter, Larzelere began to devote a significant portion of his academic life to the following pursuits:

1. attempting to demonstrate that corporal punishment is beneficial to children (Larzelere, 1996a, 2000),
2. critiquing research demonstrating the negative outcomes associated with corporal punishment (Larzelere, 1996; Baumrind, Larzelere & Cowan, 2002),
3. promoting the concept of “non-abusive spanking” (Larzelere, 1993, 1994, 1998),
4. attempting to demonstrate that the Swedish corporal punishment ban has been harmful to children (Larzelere & Johnson, 1999), and
5. arguing for parents’ right to use corporal punishment (Larzelere, Silver, Polite, 1998; Larzelere, 1997b).

While Larzelere claims to be an unbiased, objective voice on the subject of corporal punishment, the overriding theme of his work suggests otherwise. In a 1993 article which appeared in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (published by the Rosemead School of Psychology at Biola University), Larzelere sets out to “identify likely characteristics of beneficial corporal punishment” and to propose a “balanced scriptural view of spanking” (p. 142). He examines scriptural passages which he interprets as follows (p. 146): 1) the Hebrew word translated as “rod” in the Bible “can sometimes imply a large instrument” but “sometimes suggests a rather flimsy instrument, incapable of causing physical harm,” 2) spanking should take place within an overall loving relationship, 3) “parents should put more emphasis on verbal correction and less on the rod as a child grows up.” On the basis of Proverbs 17:10 and Proverbs 22:15, Larzelere concludes that

“the implication seems to be that, properly used, spanking will help remove a child’s natural foolishness from him or her, so that the child will be influenced more by verbal correction at an older age” (p. 146).

This statement demonstrates that Larzelere holds a position on corporal punishment - based on Biblical interpretation and precept - that could influence his interpretations of scientific evidence.

Larzelere has now presented a critique of my research on Sweden, published by The Christian Institute (<http://www.christian.org.uk>) and Families First (www.families-first.org.uk) in the UK. The fact that Larzelere has engaged in such a critique would suggest that he has specialized knowledge of Sweden. However, he has not published any original research on Sweden and states that he does not have access to much Swedish data.

To address Larzelere’s implication that I am one of the biased “anti-smacking advocates” (p. 16) who present “only one side of the evidence to try to impose their perspective on parents” (p. 15), I begin with an identification of the sources of my data and the steps I have taken to ensure the validity of my conclusions. Then I turn to Larzelere’s specific critiques of my conclusions.

My Data Sources

In his booklet, Larzelere implies that I have presented data of questionable validity and that my interpretations cannot be confirmed because the data are only available in Sweden. These implications have no basis in fact. The data I have presented are from the following official and public sources:

- Statistics Sweden
- National Board of Health and Welfare
- National Crime Prevention Council
- Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs
- National Institute of Public Health
- Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention

Furthermore, I have interviewed and worked with Swedish experts to ensure that my interpretations of the data are accurate. In the areas of physical assault by adults and youth, in particular, I worked closely with Monika Olsson, former Research Director of the National Crime Prevention Council, over a period of many months to ensure that my facts are correct.

I also have conducted interviews with a large number of experts from a range of sectors, including social services, crime prevention, law enforcement, justice, medicine, public health, and academia. These experts include:

- Dr. Hans Blomquist, Director of the Department of Paediatrics at Umeå University Hospital
 - Dr. Sven Bremberg, Chair, Commission on Parent Support, National Institute of Public Health
 - Ingela Bylon, Detective Inspector, National Criminal Investigation Department, Stockholm Police
 - Margareta Carlberg, psychotherapist, Social Welfare Department
 - Ann-Christin Dandanell, Supervisor of Parent-Child Residential Facilities, Göteborg
 - Dr. Åke Edfeldt, Professor of Education, Stockholm University
 - Barbro Hindberg, Swedish expert in child abuse
 - Professor Anna Hollander, legal scholar, Stockholm University
 - Tora Holst, Legal Adviser to the Office of the Children's Ombudsman
 - Gunnel Linde, Former Member, Children's Rights Commission
 - Agneta Lindelöf, District Court Judge
 - Dr. Karin Lundén, Social Worker, Psychologist, Department of Psychology, Göteborg University
 - Bodil Långberg, First Secretary, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
 - Lotta Nilsson, author of national report on violent assaults against children, National Crime Prevention Council
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- Lena Nyberg, Children's Ombudsman
- Anneke Oster, prosecuting attorney
- Gun-Marie Petterson, First Secretary of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
- Solveig Riberdahl, Vice-Prosecutor General of Sweden
- Dr. Knut Sundell, Research Director, Bureau for Research and Development, Social Welfare Administration, City of Stockholm
- Tor Sverne, Former Chair, Children's Rights Commission
- Dr. Hanns von Hofer, Criminologist, Stockholm University

Far from collecting a few figures and placing my own interpretations on them, as Larzelere implies I have done, I have spent the last 15 years studying Sweden's history, culture, socio-political system and social policy structure. I have lived in Sweden for extended periods throughout those 15 years to become familiar with the language and to seek the knowledge of Swedish experts before drawing any conclusions about the data. In all of my work on Sweden, I have taken great care to gain a deep understanding of the country to ensure that my conclusions accurately reflect the situation there.

In addition, I have collaborated with experts to ensure that my conclusions reflect a true understanding of the issues I have addressed. For example, my research on child abuse in Sweden (Durrant & Janson, 2005 forthcoming) was conducted in collaboration with Dr. Staffan Janson, Chair of the Swedish Parliamentary Commission on Child Abuse. And my research on maternal attitudes and practices (Durrant, Broberg, & Rose-Krasnor, 1999; Durrant, Rose-Krasnor & Broberg, 2003) was conducted in collaboration with Dr. Anders Broberg, a child-clinical psychologist and professor of Psychology at Göteborg University.

My conclusions are not based on a preconceived bias. Rather, they are based on all that I have learned by immersing myself in the Swedish culture and in Swedish data, and through extensive consultation with Swedish experts. I now turn to Larzelere's specific critiques of my conclusions.

Public Attitudes Toward Smacking

In his cursory examination of the public attitude data, Larzelere misrepresents my conclusions and demonstrates a lack of knowledge of the history of law reform in Sweden – a history that I have detailed in a number of articles (e.g., Durrant, 1996, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2003; Durrant & Olsen, 1997). It is difficult, if not impossible, to faithfully assess the situation without a strong grasp of this history (and of Swedish society, in general). In summary, a series of law reforms were made over the course of half a century that made the rejection of physical punishment increasingly explicit in law. The ban was not the beginning, but the end point of a long evolution of corporal punishment legislation in Sweden that unfolded over a period of decades (Durrant, 1996, 2000a, 2003; Durrant & Olsen, 1997). The progress of law reform in Sweden has been matched by an ever-declining level of public support for corporal punishment.

Larzelere's Critique #1: Attribution of Attitude Shifts Exclusively to the Ban

Larzelere (p. 6) quotes me as saying that “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” (Durrant, 1999, p. 444). He then uses this statement to claim that, “in direct contrast to Durrant’s conclusion, changes in attitudes toward physical punishment occurred before the 1979 legislation” (p. 7). His point is that if attitudes shifted prior to the explicit ban, the ban itself did not have much of an effect.

In fact, Larzelere has misrepresented my analysis and my conclusion. I have stated explicitly time and again that shifts in attitudes in Sweden have mirrored the law reforms that have taken place over past decades. In the same paragraph, I clearly state that “these findings suggest that support for physical punishment has decreased dramatically in Sweden over recent decades” (p. 444). In the same article I also state that “support for corporal punishment has declined markedly over the past 30 years” (p. 438). I have published an article that examines these attitude shifts in detail over the course of 40 years (Durrant, 2003). While the ban certainly was accompanied by a further decline in support for corporal punishment, at no time have I ever attributed public attitude shifts entirely to the explicit ban on corporal punishment. To suggest that I have done so is a fabrication.

The fact that Larzelere uses the 30-year attitude shift to suggest that law reform is ineffective in changing attitudes reveals his lack of knowledge about law reform in Sweden. He apparently is unaware that the defenses for corporal punishment by caregivers were repealed from the Penal Code in 1957 and from the Civil Code in 1966. These were highly significant law reforms that were accompanied by the very attitudinal shifts that Larzelere describes (Table 1).

Table 1: Public Support for Corporal Punishment in Sweden, 1965-1995

| YEAR | LEGAL REFORM | % agreeing "a child has to be given corporal punishment from time to time" ^a |
|---------|--|---|
| 1949 | Parents' Code established | |
| 1957 | Penal Code defense removed | |
| 1962 | Corporal punishment banned in schools and child care | |
| 1965 | | 53 |
| 1966 | Civil Code provision allowing "petty reprimands" removed | |
| 1968 | | 42 |
| 1971 | | 35 |
| 1979 | Corporal punishment explicitly prohibited in Civil Code | 26 |
| 1980 | | 29 |
| 1981 | | 26 |
| | | % positively inclined to mild physical punishment ^b |
| 1994/95 | | 11 |

^a Source: SIFO, 1981

^b Source: SCB, 1996

Larzelere's Critique #2: Choice of 1994 Survey Question

Larzelere (p. 6) states that I "compared survey questions that were very different in 1981 and 1994." He suggests that a different question from the 1994 Statistics Sweden survey on public attitudes (SCB, 1996) should have been used for comparison.

In 1981, respondents were asked whether they agreed that "a child has to be given corporal punishment from time to time." In 1994, respondents were asked whether they were "positively inclined to milder forms of physical punishment," "in principle against all forms of physical punishment, but can use such punishment if upset enough," or "against all forms of physical punishment and use only other child rearing methods." Responses to this question are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Public Support for Corporal Punishment in Sweden, 1994-1995^a

| | % positively inclined to milder forms of physical punishment | % in principle against all forms of physical punishment but can use it if upset enough | % against all physical punishment and use only other methods | Don't know /no response |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|----------------------------------|
| All adults | | | | |
| (18 to 74 years of age) | 11 | 22 | 56 | 10 |
| Compulsory education | 18 | 17 | 51 | 12 |
| University education | 4 | 25 | 65 | 6 |
| Age groupings | | | | |
| 55- to 74-year-olds | 18 | 21 | 49 | 11 |
| 35- to 54-year-olds | 10 | 25 | 58 | 7 |
| 18- to 34-year-olds | 6 | 20 | 59 | 13 |
| 13- to 15-year-olds | 6 | 17 | 70 | 4 |

^a Source: SCB, 1996

In 1994, only 11% of respondents indicated that they were positively inclined to even mild forms of physical punishment; 56% were opposed to all forms of physical punishment and use only other child rearing methods, 22% were in principle against all forms of physical punishment, but can use such punishment if upset enough, while 10% did not provide a response. Therefore, at least 78% were opposed to all forms of physical punishment in principle. Of university-educated Swedes, at least 90% are against physical punishment in principle. Certainly this has to be viewed as evidence that the majority of Swedes do not support even mild forms of physical punishment, even if some are honest enough to admit that they might use it if they are upset enough.

However, Larzelere argues that a different question should have been used from the 1994 survey to examine attitudes at that time. He suggests that the question more comparable to the 1981 question is one that asks respondents how strongly they agreed that "mild or moderate physical punishment is sometimes necessary as a child rearing method, but should be carefully considered and not the result of anger." A total of 34% of respondents agreed either fully (16%) or partly (18%) with this statement. On the basis of this finding, Larzelere concludes that the proportion of Swedes who believe that physical punishment is necessary has actually increased since the 1979 SIFO poll, when 26% of respondents agreed that physical punishment is sometimes necessary.

His reasoning, however, fails to acknowledge the question's context and its major methodological flaw. The complete question asked respondents how strongly they agreed with **two** statements: "if very angry at the child, it is acceptable to slap the child" and "mild or moderate physical punishment is sometimes necessary as a child rearing method, but should be carefully considered and not the result of anger." This question comes from an entirely different context than the 1981 question, which did not refer to the emotional state of the parent. This double-barreled question confounds the belief that spanking is sometimes necessary with the belief that when spanking is done, it should not be done in anger. It is not only possible but likely (because of the sequencing of the two statements) that respondents were replying to the "anger" component more than to the "necessity" component.

By collapsing the “fully agree” and “partly agree” response categories, Larzelere compounds this problem, since those who are partly agreeing with it may only be agreeing with the “not in anger” part, not with the “sometimes necessary” part. For this reason, we should focus on the group who fully agree with the statement, as we could assume that those respondents agree with both parts of the statement. Only 16% of adults fully agreed with the statement, a figure very close to the 11% obtained through the endorsement question (Table 3). Of university-educated Swedes, only 7% were in full agreement with the statement.

Table 3: Percentage of Respondents who Agreed or Disagreed with Double-Barrelled Statement^a, 1994-1995^b

| | Fully agree | Partly agree | Disagree | Don't know |
|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------|------------|
| All adults | | | | |
| (18 to 74 years of age) | 16 | 18 | 52 | 11 |
| Compulsory education | 23 | 18 | 40 | 15 |
| University education | 7 | 17 | 68 | 6 |
| Age groupings | | | | |
| 55- to 74-year-olds | 24 | 20 | 40 | 12 |
| 35- to 54-year-olds | 14 | 15 | 59 | 10 |
| 18- to 34-year-olds | 12 | 19 | 56 | 12 |
| 13- to 15-year-olds | 10 | 22 | 47 | 17 |

^a “Mild or moderate physical punishment is sometimes necessary as a child rearing method, but should be carefully considered and not the result of anger.”

^b Source: SCB, 1996

My colleagues and I addressed the two components of this double-barreled question separately in a study of attitudes toward spanking among a sample of Swedish mothers of preschoolers (Durrant, Rose-Krasnor & Broberg, 2003). The findings indicate that responses to the 1994 survey question were indeed confounded. Among these mothers, 80% agreed that spanking is “never necessary to instill proper conduct.” Only 11% believed that spanking is “acceptable if the parent is calm,” the same percentage that was found to be positively inclined toward mild physical punishment in the 1994 survey. We also asked additional questions about Swedish mothers’ spanking beliefs (Durrant, Rose-Krasnor & Broberg, 2003); 88% said that spanking is ineffective, 80% that it is harmful and 85% that it is a bad disciplinary technique. Only 1% said that spanking is one of the best ways for a child to learn “no”.

Therefore, findings are consistent. The vast majority of Swedes do not believe that physical punishment is a necessary or useful childrearing method. The proportion of the attitudinal shift that is due to the explicit ban versus due to prior legal reforms cannot be known. But what is clear is that law reform in Sweden has been accompanied by a dramatic decline in support for corporal punishment.

Child Physical Assault

In his booklet, Larzelere argues that physical assaults against children have not declined in Sweden since corporal punishment was banned. First, he states that “the percentage of parents using [physical punishment] dropped very little” (p. 7). Then he suggests that “parents may have become less inclined to use a mild physical sanction when they are still in control and more likely to use physical punishment when ‘upset enough’. This could easily increase the risk of child abuse” (p. 7). This argument needs to be carefully unpacked.

Larzelere’s Critique #3: Physical Punishment Has Not Declined

Larzelere states that “the actual use of physical punishment had dropped very little” by 1994 (p. 7). To make such a claim, one would expect that he would provide longitudinal data demonstrating trends in physical punishment over time. He does not provide such data. Instead, he uses cross-sectional data collected from different age groups in a single year - 1994 - to support his claim. It is not possible to assess change over time by examining data collected at one point in time. It is only possible to assess differences in the reporting of physical punishment by different age groups at that point in time.

That said, Larzelere paints a picture that portrays no differences in the generations’ experiences of physical punishment as children. A closer examination of the data, however, suggests otherwise. As Table 4 shows, the proportion of respondents reporting that they never experienced physical punishment, either before or during their teen years, increased over successive generations and successive law reforms.

Table 4: Percentage of Respondents Reporting No Experience of Physical Punishment^a

| Age | By mother before teen years | By father before teen years | By mother during teen years | By father during teen years |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 55-74 years (born 1920-1939) | 48 | 46 | 68 | 68 |
| 35-54 years (born 1940-1959) | 55 | 53 | 70 | 70 |
| 18-34 years (born 1960-1976) | 56 | 56 | 76 | 76 |
| 13-15 years (born 1979-1981) | 66 | 65 | 79 | 77 |

^a Source: SCB, 1996

However, these data cannot be used to document change over time. Not only are the data cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal, but different generations will have different levels of memory

interference. It is probable that adults' memories of their experiences as children have undergone more decay than the memories of youth. In fact, four times as many adults as youth reported that they could not remember or could not respond to the question. Therefore, it is necessary to examine data collected across time to evaluate trends in the use of physical punishment over time. While no truly longitudinal studies exist, a series of studies that collected data at different points in time can shed some light on this question.

Table 5 summarizes data from three key studies (SCB, 1996; SIFO, 1991; Stattin et al., 1995). These data refer to mothers' use of physical punishment by the time the child reached the age of 15 or 16. In the Stattin et al. (1995) and SIFO (1991) studies, mothers provided data regarding whether their children had been physically punished. In the SCB (1996) study, these data were provided by youth. A steeply declining trend can be seen in the use of physical punishment across a single generation. The authors of the SCB (1996) report do not specify how many of the youth in that study were physically punished *only* before or after becoming teenagers, so the total prevalence up to age 15 cannot be determined. However, on the basis of studies documenting age-related trends in physical punishment (Clément et al., 2000; Stattin et al., 1995; Wauchope & Straus, 1992), it could reasonably be expected that the majority of those youth who were punished while they were teenagers were also punished before they became teenagers.

Not only did the prevalence of physical punishment decline over the generation, but so did its frequency and harshness. Substantial proportions of women who became mothers in the 1950s struck their children at least weekly (e.g., 55% of mothers of 4-year-old daughters; 20% of mothers of 8-year-old sons) (Stattin et al., 1995). Among 3- to 5-year-old children, implements were used by 13% of mothers (Stattin et al., 1995) (Table 5). In contrast, the majority of youth born in 1980 reported never having been physically punished (SCB, 1996). Of those who were, the vast majority experienced it no more than once or twice in their lifetime. Virtually none were hit with implements. These findings suggest that the prevalence, frequency and harshness of physical punishment have indeed declined in Sweden since law reform began there over 4 decades ago.

Table 5: Summary of Findings on Maternal Use of Physical Punishment Over Time

| Source | Age of child at time of data collection | Year child was born | % physically punished | % hit with objects |
|-------------------------------|---|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Stattin et al., 1995 | 16 | 1955-58 | 100 | 13 |
| SIFO, 1991 | 16 | 1975 or earlier | 51 | 2 |
| SCB, 1996 | 15 | 1980 | | |
| Before a teenager | 15 | 1980 | 36 | <1 |
| While a teenager ^a | 15 | 1980 | 22 | <1 |

^a The SCB report does not indicate how many of these youth were also physically punished before becoming teenagers and how many were physically punished only after becoming teenagers.

Larzelere's Critique #4: Child Physical Abuse Has Not Declined in Sweden

Larzelere states that "the same source that [Durrant] used for her statistics on assaults against children indicates an increase in physical child abuse" (p. 8). The source to which he refers is the police database on reports of assaults against children. I have conducted and published detailed analyses of these statistics (Durrant, 1999, 2000a, 2000b) and I have clearly stated that "rates (per 1,000 population) of reported [assaults against children in Sweden] have increased" (Durrant, 1999, p. 439).

Of crucial importance is that Larzelere presents these figures as if they are actual assault rates, rather than reporting rates. This is a fundamental and serious error. While, on the one hand, he acknowledges that increases in these figures "could reflect a change in reporting mechanisms, an actual increase, or other factors," he presents the data as if they are the true incidence of child assault when he states that the source "indicates sharply increasing rates of physical child abuse" (p. 8). He states that the "frequency" of physical assaults by relatives against children under the age of seven increased by 489% between 1981 and 1994. This presentation of the data distorts their meaning.

It is a well-established fact that, with regard to assault, reporting rates are highly vulnerable to changes in legal and cultural definitions of violence, as well as public sensitivity. Examples from introductory criminology textbooks follow:

- "The official number of crimes may change artificially if citizens become more or less likely to report offenses committed against them . . . The increased number of reported rapes in the last two decades in the United States may partly reflect growing awareness by women and police of rape. This awareness may be prompting more women to call the police and more police to record the incident as a rape" (Barkan, 1997, p. 57).
- "Recent changes in police policy limit police discretion in laying charges when handling domestic violence incidents. This policy has produced more official incidents of such assault, reflecting changes in police practice, if not changes in criminal behaviour" (Linden, 1996, p. 82).

If we look at the U.S., we see the same phenomenon. In the early 1960s, Henry Kempe (the physician who first identified child abuse as a problem in the U.S.) estimated that about 300 children were being maltreated in the U.S. By 1990, the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect had officially recorded 2.4 million cases. By 1993, they had recorded almost 3 million cases (Melton & Barry, 1994). Would it be accurate to suggest that child maltreatment increased by 1,000% in that period? Or that only 300 children were maltreated in the U.S. in the early 1960s? As mandatory reporting laws, public education campaigns, and other measures are implemented to increase awareness, reporting will increase relative to incidence.

One method of addressing the question of whether changes in reporting rates reflect actual changes in assault rates is to examine the nature of the assaults reported. If police statistics are highly vulnerable to the public's willingness to report assaults, the *frequency* of reporting would be expected to increase following law reform and public education, but the *severity* of the incidents reported would not be expected to increase. Such a finding would suggest that the public's threshold for accepting more minor assaults has decreased, but that the degree of violence against children has not increased.

Larzelere addresses this question by comparing the percentage increase in reports of aggravated assaults against children between 1984 and 1994 to the percentage increase in all reported assaults against children between 1984 and 1994. He concludes that because the former increased by 388% and the latter increased by 277%, this "provides strong evidence against criminal assault records becoming increasingly predominated by mild incidents." This conclusion is erroneous, however, because Larzelere's analysis does not compare the proportions of aggravated assault reports to total assault reports. The appropriate analysis would be to compare the proportion of all assault reports composed of aggravated assault reports annually over several years, the very analysis which I have

conducted. The proportion of total assault reports composed of aggravated assault reports was 15% or less in every year between 1981 and 1996. It was highest in 1988 (15%) and lowest in 1996 (3%) (Durrant, 2000a).

An analysis of police reports was conducted by Sweden's National Council for Crime Prevention (*Brottsförebyggande rådet: BRÅ*; Nilsson, 2000). An examination was made of the 434 cases of assaults on young children (0 – 6 years) within the family that were reported to the police in 1990 and 1997. According to the findings of this study, the number of serious injuries sustained by children in this age range decreased substantially over that decade in proportion to cases of milder injury and cases of no injury. The majority of reported assaults resulted in minor or no injuries. During the period studied, there was also a decrease in reports by physicians and other health care professionals, who generally report the severe cases of child assault. A small increase in absolute numbers of severe injury cases was seen in only one category - biting, which was not reported at all prior to the 1990s.

The study's author concluded that the apparent increase in reported assaults was due to an increase in the public's willingness to report less severe incidents of assault, an indicator of a shift in public definitions of violence. In her words, "there has been an increase in the propensity to report cases of assault on young children . . . it is this increase that is responsible for most, if not all, of the rise in the number of such offences reported to the police" (Nilsson, 2000, p. 68).

Larzelere's Critique #5: Swedish Child Abuse Rates Were Higher than the High American Rates After the Ban

Larzelere cites a study by Gelles and Edfeldt (1986) to claim that "the Swedish child abuse rate was 49% higher in 1980 than the average of the 1975 and 1985 American rates" (p. 13). This claim is fraught with errors.

Gelles & Edfeldt (1986) asked large and representative samples of American and Swedish parents to report their use of a range of physical punishments using the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS: Straus, 1979). The Swedish survey was conducted in 1980 and the data were compared to those from the 1975 National Family Violence Survey in the U.S. Larzelere argues that a more comparable U.S. study is the 1985 National Family Violence Survey because it, like the 1980 Swedish survey, used telephone interviews, rather than the face-to-face interviews used in the 1975 American survey. Because the 1985 National Family Violence Survey yielded lower reporting rates than the 1975 National Family Violence Survey, Larzelere calculated an average of the 1975 and 1985 U.S. rates and compared them to the 1980 Swedish rates (Larzelere & Johnson, 1999).

This is an inappropriate use of the data for several reasons. First, Larzelere has created data that do not actually exist. Averaging the data from two different years and then treating that average as if it is an accurate estimate of a year in-between is inappropriate. This problem is compounded by the fact that the 1975 and 1985 data were collected using two different methodologies. What Larzelere has done is analogous to recording the temperature on October 1 using a thermometer, recording the temperature on May 1 using computerized instruments, averaging those two measurements and treating that average as an estimate of the temperature on January 1. It is simply inappropriate.

Second, by creating an average for the American sample but not the Swedish sample, Larzelere is assuming that the Swedish rate was not only static during the time period, but that it would have been unaffected by the methodology used. We do not know, in other words, whether the Swedish reporting rates would also have declined - perhaps to an even greater extent than the American rate - by 1985.

Third, while the 1975 U.S. survey and the 1980 Swedish survey differed in their methodologies, they shared an important similarity in terms of social history. The Swedish survey was conducted one year after the corporal punishment ban was passed, while the U.S. survey was carried out one year after the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was passed in that country. CAPTA identified criteria for defining child maltreatment; provided funds to support research, training and prevention; and identified the role of the federal government in child protection (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, 2003). The passage of each of these laws was a landmark event; each contributed to a re-definition of violence against children. The effects of these legislative reforms on parents' reporting and on their actual behaviour can be at least partially controlled by examining parents' responses to the CTS one year after each reform had taken place - 1975 in the case of the U.S. and 1980 in the case of Sweden. This was the comparison made by Gelles and Edfeldt (1986).

The data published by Gelles and Edfeldt (1986) are presented in Table 6. Parents were asked whether they had ever used each form of violence and whether they had used it in the year prior to the survey. Overall, twice as many American parents (63.0%) reported using violence toward their children as did Swedish parents (29.8%) during the previous year. In addition, more American than Swedish parents reported using violence at any time - a measure that would include acts of violence committed many years earlier (target children ranged in age from 3 to 17).

Table 6: Parents' Reports of Physical Violence Against their Children in the U.S. and Sweden^a

| | Ever Used (%) | | Used in Previous Year (%) | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|--------|---------------------------|--------|
| | U.S. | Sweden | U.S. | Sweden |
| Threw things at | 9.0 | 13.2 | 5.4 | 3.6 |
| Pushed, grabbed or shoved | 46.0 | 63.3 | 40.5 | 49.4 |
| Hit (spanked or slapped) | 71.0 | 51.2 | 58.2 | 27.5 |
| Kicked, bit or hit with fist | 8.0 | 8.4 | 3.2 | 2.2 |
| Hit with an object | 20.0 | 7.7 | 13.4 | 2.4 |
| Beat up | 4.0 | 8.0 | 1.3 | 3.0 |
| Threatened with a knife or gun | 2.8 | 1.5 | 0.1 | 0.4 |
| Used a knife or gun | 2.9 | 1.3 | 0.1 | 0.4 |
| All forms of violence | 73.0 | 66.0 | 63.0 | 29.8 |
| Severe Violence Index A ^b | | | 14.2 | 4.6 |
| Severe Violence Index B ^c | | | 3.6 | 4.1 |

^a Source: Gelles & Edfeldt, 1986.

^b Items 4 through 8

^c Items 4, 6 through 8

Hitting¹ was significantly less common among Swedish parents than among American parents. While 27.5% of Swedish parents reported spanking or slapping their children in the previous year (which would have been the first year following the passage of the ban), 51.2% of American parents reported spanking or slapping their children in the first year following the passage of CAPTA. There were no significant differences in the rates with which the Swedish and U.S. samples reported that they had thrown things; kicked, bit, or hit their children with fists; pushed, grabbed or shoved their children; beat up their children; or threatened them with or used a knife or gun.

When we examine the most severe forms of violence - beating up, threatening with or using a weapon - we see that the rates are very low in both countries (Table 6). The extremely small frequencies in both countries indicate that these groups are statistical and psychological outliers and cannot be viewed as representative of their populations. These violent individuals are unlikely to be amenable to public education or legal reform strategies (Edfeldt, 1985; R. Gelles, personal communication, February 19, 2003). "Such severe abuse is usually part of strongly deviant behavior in an adult, due to personality disturbance or mental illness. Such personality factors are probably little affected by general changes in attitudes in the rest of the population" (Janson, 2002, p. 2).

In interpreting the findings of this study, it is important to consider the methodological and cultural issues raised by Gelles and Edfeldt in their discussion of the data. They point to several important differences between the studies that could have contributed to the results obtained. First, the Swedish interviewers were trained psychologists, whereas the U.S. survey was administered by professional interviewers employed by a survey research firm. "We know that [the Swedish psychologists] were able to obtain a higher response rate than the American survey research firm. They may have been more successful in eliciting more truthful answers from the respondents" (p. 508).

Second, Gelles and Edfeldt suggest that Sweden's non-violent culture may have heightened the salience of parents' own acts of violence in their memories.

"If one continues to assume that Swedish parents are indeed less violent, then this too could have produced more accurate reporting. If violence is indeed unusual in Sweden, then Swedish parents may have been more likely to remember these unusual behaviors. If violence is as American as apple pie, then American parents may have been more likely to under-report the routine use of all forms of violence. Thus, Swedish parents may be less violent towards their children than American parents even though a combination of methodological biases produced similar rates for the abusive forms of violent behavior" (p. 508).

However, even if one were to assume that the data obtained in this study are valid and reliable, they are not adequate to assess the impact of Sweden's corporal punishment ban because the survey did not use a longitudinal or successive independent samples design. It may be the case that rates of parental violence toward children in Sweden were higher in previous years and lower in subsequent years. This simply cannot be determined through an examination of Gelles and Edfeldt's (1986) data.

Larzelere's Critique #6: Child Abuse Mortality Has Not Declined

Larzelere considers it "noteworthy" that I have focused on child abuse fatalities in an attempt to examine the actual rate of child physical abuse in Sweden. I fail to grasp his implication here, but it appears that he has not read the rationale that I have provided for examining these statistics: "It is those child deaths that result specifically from physical abuse which the World Health Organization considers to most reliably reflect the rate of child abuse in a nation (UNICEF, 1994)" because they are less vulnerable to reporting trends and "are unequivocal as indicators of violence" (Durrant, 1999, p. 440-441).

Larzelere then goes on to state that "Sweden had one of the lowest mortality rates for young children both before and after the 1979 ban on smacking. As Durrant has noted, the change from before to after

¹ The difference for hitting with an object is not reliable because the Swedish item asked only about completed hits, while the American item included attempted hits.

1979 failed to achieve statistical significance" (p. 8). His implication is that the ban had no effect on child abuse fatalities. Two fundamental logical flaws underlie this statement.

First, this statement amplifies Larzelere's fundamental misunderstanding of law reform in Sweden. The corporal punishment ban did not emerge in a social vacuum. As I have documented repeatedly in my publications, the ban was the final step in an evolution of law reform and public attitudes that increasingly rejected the use of physical punishment in education and childrearing. By focusing exclusively on the ban, without even a mention of the law reforms that preceded it, Larzelere has de-contextualized the ban and demonstrated a fundamental misunderstanding of its purpose. The Swedish ban was an affirmation of rights and one of a broad and coherent set of policies that respect children as persons and recognize their developmental needs – policies that I have described elsewhere (Durrant & Olsen, 1997).

Second, the change in child abuse mortality rates from before to after 1979 "failed to reach statistical significance" because the incidence rates are so remarkably low. As I have stated elsewhere (Durrant 1999), between 1971 and 1975, five children died in Sweden as a result of physical abuse and 4 children died in this way between 1990 and 1996. *In all of the remaining years, the annual incidence of child abuse mortality was zero.* It is simply impossible to reduce the incidence any further. It has never exceeded one death in any year since 1971. In order to reduce it further, it would have to remain at zero indefinitely. Larzelere's argument is fallacious and misleading.

Larzelere's Critique #7: Child Abuse Mortality Rates Do Not Differ Between Nations With and Without Corporal Punishment Bans

Larzelere cites figures (UNICEF, 2003) which he claims demonstrate that child abuse mortality rates in nations with and without corporal punishment bans are "scientifically indistinguishable". There are two critical errors in his claim.

First, he has not acknowledged the fact that the Swedish data are from 1992-1996 – the only 5-year period since 1975 in which there were any child abuse deaths in that country. Had UNICEF taken any other 5-year snapshot over the past 25 years, the rate for Sweden would have been zero.

Second, Larzelere attempts to summarize two complex tables of figures on 27 countries in one simple sentence: "Overall, the mean explicit maltreatment death rate was 0.6 per 100,000 children in the four countries with prior smacking bans and 0.7 per 100,000 in the 22 countries without prior smacking bans, rates that are scientifically indistinguishable" (p. 8).

What is not apparent from his sentence is the fact that when deaths from maltreatment (unrevised rate) are combined with deaths from undetermined causes (revised rate), the picture changes. UNICEF (2003) calculated the revised figures on the assumption that "when no other cause or motive can be established the death of a child is most likely to be the result of abuse or neglect that cannot be proven in a court of law" (p. 7).

The findings indicate that the mean revised death rate in countries with bans (at the time of the data collection) remains steady at 0.6, but the mean revised death rate in countries without bans rises to 1.1. An examination of individual countries' rates shows that in those countries with bans, the unrevised and revised rates are virtually identical. It is only in countries without bans where differences between the unrevised and revised rates are seen. For example, the UK rate more than doubles from 0.4 to 0.9, France's rate almost triples from 0.5 to 1.4; and Portugal's rate rises from 0.4 to 3.7. While not all countries without bans show increases from their unrevised to revised rates, it is only in these countries where such increases are seen. And while some countries without bans have low child maltreatment death rates, the only countries in which the revised death rate exceeds 2.0 per 100,000 are among those without corporal punishment bans (the US at 2.4, Mexico at 3.0, and Portugal at 3.7).

Violence by Young Perpetrators

In his discussion of youth assault rates, Larzelere confuses many issues and clearly misunderstands my analysis. First, he again presents reporting rates as actual rates of assault. As I have stated previously, reporting of violent crime is highly vulnerable to shifts in definitions of violence and in enforcement. An understanding of this fact is crucial to any interpretation of assault statistics.

Second, an examination of assault rates by youth must take into consideration the qualitative differences among assaults by adults against children and those by children against children. These two kinds of assaults happen for different reasons within different contexts and they have different law enforcement outcomes. To confabulate them, as Larzelere has done, is to reveal a fundamental lack of understanding of the meaning of these statistics.

Third, it is critical to examine rates. In the case of child maltreatment deaths, Larzelere was quite comfortable in examining rates, rather than absolute numbers. I assume that this is because he understood that to compare the annual number of child maltreatment deaths in Sweden (near zero) to the number in the US (at least 2,000; U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1995) during the 1990s would exaggerate the difference between the two countries. I expect that he would advise anyone to consider the difference in the sizes of the two populations before drawing any conclusions. But in his booklet, he states that, in the case of youth assault statistics, the use of percentages “distances the readers from the actual descriptive data and obscures the fact that assaults against children were increasing for all age groups” (p. 9). I will address each of these issues in turn.

Larzelere’s Critique #8: Assault Rates among Swedish Youth

Once again, Larzelere presents police reporting statistics as if they are rates of actual assault: “Table 1 summarizes the percentage increases in criminal assaults . . .” (p. 9). The figures he presents are *reports* of assaults to the police. This distinction is absolutely critical to understanding these figures. It is also critical to understand that these figures apply to assaults by youth against children aged 7 to 14. As I have explained in depth in my two publications that addressed youth assault, Sweden has been a leader in anti-bullying education, which began there in earnest in the 1980s. The first anti-bullying initiatives began in Norway in the early 1980s and were subsequently adopted by Sweden. For example, through the 1980s and 1990s, the Education Act was amended to state that schools are responsible for counteracting bullying, the Occupational Safety Act was extended to include pupils in schools, and police officers began to work actively in the schools to counter bullying.

I have provided all of this information in my published papers (Durrant, 2000a, 2000b). For example, “all forms of bullying have been banned by the schools; principals now routinely report 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” (Durrant, 2000a, p. 24). Therefore, presenting police reporting statistics as if they are rates of actual assault is misleading because they have been so heavily influenced by a societal shift in legal definitions of assault. Obviously, as bullying is taken seriously and reported to the police, police reports are going to increase.

As I have demonstrated elsewhere, (Durrant, 2000a, 2000b), there is consistent evidence from victimization studies, self-report studies, homicide figures, rape figures, convictions of youth for assault against other age groups, and seasonal trends in reporting that the increase in reporting is most likely exactly that – an increase in reporting, not in actual rates.

Larzelere cites a paper by Hanns von Hofer (1995) that demonstrates that violent victimization rates among youth were stable between 1982 and 1993. He points out that these victimization studies referred to 16 to 20 year-olds, not to 7 to 14 year-olds, who are the focus of the police reporting statistics. He cites von Hofer as concluding that “the rate of criminal assaults by minors (7-14 years) has increased much more dramatically than other age groups” (p. 14). However, he neglects to include von Hofer’s statement that “one conceivable explanation of the steep increase could be that cases of school violence are brought more often to the attention of the police in recent years . . . stable rates of victimization have been reported by high school pupils in Stockholm for the years 1987, 1990, 1993 and 1996” (p. 11).

Other studies have also found stable victimization rates among 15-year-olds between 1987 and 1996 (Qvarnström & Mårtensson, 1996), as well as stable rates of self-reported violence among 15-year-old male students between 1971 and 1996 (Ward, 1997). According to von Hofer,

“since 1995, there have been regular nation-wide self-report studies. They reveal two consistent trends: theft crimes are decreasing, violence is stable” (personal communication, June 4, 2004).

Larzelere’s Critique #9: Use of Percentages Rather than Absolute Numbers

Larzelere claims that I arrived at an erroneous conclusion about youth assault rates because I “reported the percentage of all perpetrators who were in a particular age cohort rather than the actual frequency of criminal assaults” (p.9). I have four responses to this claim.

1. My analyses were based on the best approximation of actual criminal assault figures – conviction rates. I also examined data on suspects (cases legally pursued) because these figures provided the ages of alleged victims and they at least have enough evidence behind them to be pursued.
2. I used percentages rather than absolute figures to control for differences in the size of the population over time.
3. I examined the percentage of all assault convictions accounted for by youth in order to determine whether any increase is truly a youth phenomenon. If one is going to draw conclusions about whether “youth violence” has increased, one must examine whether any increase is unique to youth. Larzelere attempts to do this by simply comparing absolute numbers of police reports for different age groups which is a faulty method for answering the question.
4. I examined conviction rates annually over a 20-year period (1975 to 1996) and I examined suspect rates annually over a 10-year period (1984 to 1994). Larzelere, on the other hand, has drawn his conclusions from a single table of absolute numbers of police reports at two points in time - 1984 and 1994. It is possible that the reporting patterns in either or both of these two years were not representative of reporting patterns generally. I conducted statistical significance tests on the trends over time to provide an objective criterion for assessing any apparent increases or decreases. Larzelere provides no such analyses.

Far from “obscuring” the facts, I have addressed this issue in depth and at length. The data show that the proportion of convictions composed of individuals aged 15 to 17 years remained steady between 1975 and 1996 (Durrant, 2000b). This finding indicates that, over a 20 year period, the proportion of assault convictions accounted for by youth did not increase.

Larzelere's Critique #10: Age Groupings of Assault Suspects

Larzelere makes two claims about my analyses of the assault data by age of alleged perpetrator. First, he states (p. 10) that "in her published article [Durrant] combined data on assaults against children as well as assaults against 7-14 year-olds." This is not the case. The relevant paragraph (Durrant, 1999) states:

"The proportion of suspects who were aged 15 to 19 in cases of alleged assaults against young children (aged 0 to 6) remained steady between 1984 and 1994 ($n = 5, t = 2, p = .5000$; range = 2% to 7%, $M = 4.2%$) (SCB, 1995). It should be noted that the annual mean number of youth suspected of assaults against young children was 3, with a range of 0 to 5 over the decade. The proportion of suspects who were aged 15 to 19 in cases of alleged assaults against older children (aged 7 to 14) also remained steady between 1984 and 1994 ($n = 5, t = 2, p = .5000$; range = 34% to 48%, $M = 40.4%$)" (p. 445).

Second, Larzelere claims that I "featured adults in their twenties as the youngest cohort" (p. 9), arguing that I have obscured differences between 20 to 24 year-olds and 25 to 29 year-olds by collapsing them into a single category. I collapsed these two groups simply to make a more fair comparison between the 30 to 39 year-old and 40 to 49 year-old groups, which are the groupings provided in the official statistics.

Safety Networks of Support for Child-Rearing in Sweden

In this section of his booklet, Larzelere demonstrates a lack of understanding of the Swedish child welfare system. He also paints a very confusing picture of my research findings.

Larzelere's Critique #11: Compulsory Child Welfare Measures Are Severe

Larzelere claims that I have misrepresented the nature of voluntary and compulsory child welfare measures in Sweden. He describes the situation this way:

"In the compulsory programme, parents are allowed to see their children only once a month for a closely supervised visit. Most parents therefore choose the voluntary programme as the lesser of two evils. Their child might be taken away from their home ..., but at least they will be able to visit the child more often and have a greater chance of being reunited" (p.11).

In fact, the only difference between compulsory and voluntary care in Sweden is that parents can choose to discontinue the care if it is voluntary. It is common for care that begins as a compulsory measure to become voluntary after a period of time. The frequencies of parent-child visits are determined by the needs of the child. In most cases, parents see their children regularly. The frequency of visits can vary from once a week to once every two weeks to once a month, depending on the nature of the problems that brought the child into care. For example, if the child has been abused sexually or physically, or neglected, the decisions would be different than if the parent is experiencing other kinds of problems. In the case of children who have not been harmed physically, all parents can visit their children without supervision. As much as possible, foster homes are found near the birthparents' homes so that children can go home for weekends (K. Lundén, Social Worker, Psychologist, Department of Psychology, Göteborg University, personal communication, June 7, 2004).

Larzelere's portrayal of the Swedish child welfare system as "evil" appears to be based solely on a speech given by Mrs. Siv Westerberg, a lawyer, who states that Sweden has developed into a "socio-medical totalitarian state, where families are deprived of the right to care for and educate their own children; and are deprived of the basic human right to both family life and private life" (Westerberg, 1999, p. 1). She goes on to say that "where other European dictatorships once used policemen and armed soldiers to make the citizens obedient, the Swedish authorities use doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers, pre-school teachers and child-care assistants to do their dirty work for them." The absurdity of these statements renders them unworthy of comment.

In describing the child welfare system, Westerberg states that "biological parents are permitted to see their children for just a few hours, just a few times a year; even then under close supervision by social workers and/or the foster-parents. If the children were very small when they were taken into forcible care, they will soon forget their parents. And children and parents will soon become strangers to each other" (p. 3). Westerberg does not provide a single source of support for her statements. She does not even pretend to have conducted research in the area. She is simply stating her personal opinions which are not based on fact.

Larzelere's Critique #12: 46% of Children in the Child Welfare System have been Removed from their Homes

In my published papers, I have provided detailed information about the child welfare system in Sweden, as well as annual rates of various measures taken. Larzelere has reduced this comprehensive analysis to one statistic: "what Durrant calls 'support and care measures' consist of removal from the home for 46% of new children in the system . . . This is not the kind of 'increasingly preventive' child welfare measure that I would welcome" (p. 11).

This statement demonstrates Larzelere's utter lack of knowledge of the Swedish system. First, he does not address the fact that young offenders are referred to the social welfare system. As I have clearly stated, "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 . . . 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 . . . Therefore, it should be remembered that Swedish support and care statistics include young offenders" (Durrant, 2000a, p. 19). Larzelere apparently does not know that Sweden's social welfare figures include children who, in most other countries, would be in detention centres.

Second, he acknowledges that the percentage of measures involving out-of-home care has declined, but then immediately negates that fact: "What Durrant calls 'support and care measures' consist of removal from the home for 46% of the new children in the system, down from 60% being removed from the home . . . in 1982. So her hypothesis that early identification of problems was 'intended to lead to earlier, more supportive intervention' turns out to mean removal from the home in at least 46% of the new cases receiving 'support and care measures'" (p. 11). Yet he has just said that the proportion of measures involving out-of-home care has declined. I fail to follow his logic.

Third, Larzelere has a distorted view of what "out-of-home care" means in Sweden. When he uses the term "removal from the home," he paints a picture of forced apprehensions, breaking up families, and the like. What he apparently does not know is that out-of-home care is very different in Sweden than it is in North America. For example, it is quite common that the entire family, not just the child, goes "into care" (A. Dandanell, Supervisor, Parent-Child Residential Facilities, personal communication, Göteborg, May, 2003). What this means is that the family can move together into an apartment where they have 24-hour access to support services. They can stay in these apartments for as long as they like. Often, during this period, their difficulties are resolved and they all go back home together. If their problems are not resolved, they have an opportunity to get to know the family who will foster the child, as well as the social worker who will work with both families. Of course, at times, it will become necessary to arrange permanent out-of-home care. But this measure constituted only 13% of all measures in 1995, down 54% from 1982.

Larzelere's Critique #13: Children are Much More Likely to be Removed from their Homes in Sweden than in Other European Countries

Larzelere's approach to the number of children in out-of-home care in Sweden is confused and misinformed. He states: "Using 1981 data, Ivarsson records that around 22,000 children in Sweden were removed from their homes in 1981 . . . Durrant corroborates this by showing that there were 22,807 Swedish children in out-of-home care in 1982, 4,839 for the first time that year" (p. 12).

I did **not** corroborate the claim that 22,000 children *were removed from their homes* in 1981. The 22,807 out-of-home measures implemented in 1982 included those children who were placed in out-of-home care in that year *as well as* all those who were placed in out-of-home care in previous years and who remained in out-of-home care in 1982. Of that total number, 4,839 out-of-home measures were implemented for children new to the system in 1982. I fail to understand how a statement that clearly contradicts Ivarsson's claim can be seen by Larzelere as corroborating it.

Furthermore, Larzelere's use of 1981 figures is not very useful, since a new Social Services Act was introduced in 1982, as I have noted elsewhere (Durrant, 2000a). It is for this reason that I use 1982 figures as a starting point for comparisons to more recent years.

But most importantly, the relevance of citing 1981 figures without any examination of figures from subsequent years is highly questionable. Is Larzelere's implication that the number of children receiving care measures in 1981 a direct result of the 1979 ban? Such a conclusion would be astonishingly simplistic – particularly as I have provided figures showing that, by 1995, the *total* number of children in out-of-home care declined to 16,997 (-26%) and the number of children *new to the system* who were placed in out of home care declined to 3,855 (-20%).

Larzelere again relies on Mrs. Westerberg here to support his statement that "Sweden has about 15,000 children in care, compared with 40,000 in Great Britain, which has a population more than seven times the size of Sweden" (p. 12). Mrs. Westerberg has not provided her sources for these figures, so they cannot be validated. Nor does Larzelere document the year to which these numbers refer, the ages of the children, or how the British statistics were collected. For example, in the early 1980s, some nations (including England) calculated their rates on the basis of the number of children in care on a particular day of the year, while others (such as Sweden) calculated them on the flow of measures implemented throughout an entire year, which could lead to a substantial difference in figures. There is no way to validate the comparability of international figures on the basis of the meagre information Larzelere has provided.

Larzelere's Main Conclusion

Larzelere concludes his booklet by stating, "at every point, the evidence contradicts Dr. Durrant's conclusions" (p. 14). He could only have arrived at this statement by ignoring all of the information that I have reiterated here, and more. He goes on to write, "before other countries follow Sweden's example of a smacking ban, they need to explain Sweden's subsequent increase in child abuse and criminal assaults, if they hope to avoid those consequences of the Swedish example" (p. 14-15). This statement is misleading for the following reasons.

1. Larzelere again presents reporting statistics as true assault statistics, a serious error to which I have already referred.
2. Second, Larzelere attributes shifts in those reporting statistics directly to the corporal punishment ban. In fact, he makes a point of emphasizing this causal conclusion by repeating it:

"As one of the least violent countries in the world, perhaps Sweden can afford a six-fold increase in criminal assaults by minors against minors. Most countries cannot risk a six-fold increase in criminal assaults by minors" (p. 15).

The authors of the booklet's foreword (Norman Wells of Families First and Colin Hart of The Christian Institute) repeat it again:

"[Larzelere] concludes that perhaps countries with a historically low level of violence – like Sweden – may be able to cope with a six-fold increase in child-on-child assault. Other countries – like the UK – cannot" (p. 3).

In another publication from Families First (undated), this conclusion appears again:

"The inadvisability of legislating against the use of physical chastisement by parents is further reinforced by findings which suggest that such a measure may, in fact, contribute to an increase of violence and abuse against children rather than reduce it" (p. 29).

The degree of oversimplification apparent in this conclusion is very surprising, particularly as Larzelere's voice has been perhaps the most ardent in cautioning readers against drawing causal conclusions regarding the negative outcomes consistently associated with corporal punishment in the literature (e.g., Baumrind, Larzelere, & Cowan, 2002). While studies that have controlled for a wide range of variables have not been viewed by Larzelere as adequate for attributing negative outcomes to corporal punishment – even if those outcomes are consistent across large numbers of studies (Gershoff, 2002) – he is confident in attributing extremely complex social trends, in a nation of which he has little knowledge, to one single historical event. In drawing this simplistic conclusion, he has neglected to consider potential confounding variables as fundamental as changes in population size, let alone familiarizing himself with shifts in law enforcement, changes in methods of statistical record-keeping, or reforms of criminal and civil legislation over time.

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3. Larzelere may not be aware that 14 countries already have followed Sweden's example by banning physical punishment of children. They are Finland (1983), Norway (1987), Austria (1989), Denmark (1994/1997), Cyprus (1994), Latvia (1998), Croatia (1998), Bulgaria (2000), Israel (2000), Germany (2000), Iceland (2003), Hungary (2004), Ukraine (2004), and Romania (2005) . These bans were not passed on the basis of irrefutable evidence of bans' positive effects. Rather, they were passed on principle – to give children and adults equal protection from assault. Larzelere's suggestion that a law affirming children's rights to protection must first be demonstrably successful by some measure misses the point of these laws.

By Larzelere's logic, we should not have a law protecting adults from assault if we find that assaults increase in nations with such laws. Certainly we would never consider such a thing. Instead, we would search for the true causes of violence and seek to end them. But we would never sacrifice our assault laws simply because they have not eradicated assault.

Summary

Larzelere's booklet is based on superficial analyses of complex data. In it, he misinterprets statistics, draws unfounded conclusions, and demonstrates a lack of knowledge of Swedish society. His publication is a polemic that serves no useful purpose in this important debate.

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