

Ongoing international evaluation of Swedish health economics research

The government has commissioned FAS to carry out an analysis of Swedish health economics research. The commission should include an inventory and evaluation of research carried out in the area. The evaluation should pertain to the scientific quality as well as the social relevance of the research.

A group of international experts in health economics has been set up to carry out the evaluation. The group consists of Professor Grete Botten, University of Oslo, Norway; Professor Michael Drummond, University of York, UK; Professor Unto Häkkinen, STAKES, Finland; and Professor Kjeld Møller Pedersen, University of Southern Denmark.

The evaluation will include an inventory, bibliometric analyses as well as interviews with researchers and relevant policy makers. The report will be submitted to Government by the end of February 2006.

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Mapping and evaluation of Swedish work environment research

FAS has been assigned by Government to analyse Swedish research in the area of work environment. The assignment relates primarily to research dealing with chemical and biological health hazards, physical health hazards and research into physical strain injuries, including the interplay with mental stress. The assignment includes mapping and evaluation of completed research as well as the highlighting of future research needs within the area. Head of the investigation is Professor Christer Hogstedt, Swedish National Institute of Public Health.

Sweden has historically been very successful in its efforts to eliminate risks of injuries caused by deficiencies in the work environment. A large part of this success is due to the qualified knowledge base

developed through research. Work environment research has also acquired a greater element of lifestyle and public health aspects, and a shift in interest has taken place from workplace conditions to living conditions, and from physical work environment to psychosocial work environment. Research funding has diminished steadily over the last ten years and there is widespread concern about the possibilities of long-term funding.

The assignment will be reported in spring 2007.

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WORK-IN-NET – FAS' second ERA-NET

One of FAS' two ERA-NETs supported within the Sixth Research Framework Programme is the WORK-IN-NET Coordination Action. The Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems (VINNOVA) and FAS are the Swedish partners in this cooperation.

The purpose of WORK-IN-NET is a systematic exchange of information and best practices with regard to specific national approaches as well as stimulating mutual learning processes on strategies and contents of the programmes which may include a broad range of aspects. The aim is furthermore to identify current research and development cultures and climates of innovative initiatives and policies.

Other participating countries include Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway and Poland. Coordinator for WORK-IN-NET is Dr Claudio Zettel in Bonn, Germany, e-mail: Claudio.Zettel@dlr.de.

Last spring two workshops were held in Stockholm on the topics of "Corporate social cultures for implementing innovative work organisations" and "Human resource management for improving quality of working life and labour productivity".

The Stockholm meeting also included a steering committee meeting. The workshops focussed on the working balance between the state, social partners, and individual employees with the aim of creating better working conditions promoting labour productivity and quality. Joint transnational projects

in the future were discussed at the meeting.

A report entitled *Quality of Working Life, Industrial Relations and Labour Productivity* will be made available at the WORK-IN-NET website, www.workinnet.org, where further information can also be found.

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Current projects

Combining parenthood with career

A contributing cause of ill health and sickness absence in the '60s and '70s generation?

The options for young people to combine parenthood and career are of major importance to the development of working life and society. Between 1963 and 2002 the proportion of working men fell from 89 to 76% while the proportion of working women rose from 53 to 73%.

At the same time, difficulties balancing family life and working life may be contributing to the diminishing number of childbirths. It is important to establish under which circumstances parenthood and working can be successfully combined, and under which circumstances there can be a negative effect on health and well-being.

The question is relevant for women, and increasingly for men as well. While there are growing demands that responsibility for children and home be shared, employer attitudes are not changing at the same rate.

In recent years, sickness absence has increased significantly in Sweden. Sickness absence probably has different explanations depending on the individual's stage in the life cycle. The rise in sickness absence has been greatest among women, especially of childbearing age, and diagnoses with psychological associations have increased particularly among younger individuals.

In the project the researchers will investigate whether the combination of parenthood and career contributes to increased ill health and sickness absence among younger generations. The study is based on registry data. The study population comprises all women born 1960–1979 (approx. one

million), as well as the men married to or cohabiting with the women at the time their children were born. Sickness absence in the period 1990–2003 will be analysed with respect to the entire study population, while different symptoms of ill health will be based on the periodic surveys conducted by Statistics Sweden. Exposure determination will be based on the number of children and their ages. The interaction with e.g. job pressures, shared responsibility, civil status, financial situation and the mother's age will be studied.

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Alcohol in Eastern Europe

A public health perspective

Alcohol consumption is a major public health problem in Eastern Europe. Using time series analysis, the researchers in this project will study the effects of alcohol consumption on various forms of mortality in several countries throughout the region: Bulgaria, the former Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the former East Germany, and Russia.

Similar analyses which have recently been carried out in Western Europe show that alcohol-related mortality rises more rapidly per litre of alcohol in Northern Europe than in the south. Due to similarities in drinking patterns, the researchers believe the corresponding effect to be at least as great in Eastern European countries as in Northern Europe.

The project also includes a descriptive part where differences in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related mortality over the last twenty years will be studied in a larger number of Eastern European countries. Expansion of the EU increases the demand for such knowledge, not least in the context of developing public health policy within the EU.

A reference group of researchers with expert knowledge of Eastern Europe has been established and will be called on for collaboration at an early stage. The project is expected to contribute important information about the effects of alcohol on public health in these countries while also stimulating the alcohol debate in all of Europe.

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A grey zone in labour law between public and private

With the transfer of community-based social care and services from fairly large public entities to smaller and increasingly privatised operations, some occupational categories have found themselves in a “grey zone” between public and private. These occupations include personal assistants, living support assistants, personal representatives and family caregivers.

While operations have been privatised, provisions of public law continue to apply and the operations are publicly funded. Sometimes the tasks are carried out by a family member, which also places the work in a grey zone between employee relationship and family relationship. Approximately the same tasks can moreover be handled in the form of assignments or through various forms of subsidies or as employment.

If the services are provided by employees, these may be employed by the municipality, various types of contractors, or by the users themselves. Important in this context is that key sections of Swedish labour law exclude work carried out in the employer’s household as well as work performed by a member of the employer’s family. Different labour law regulations consequently apply depending on who the employer is. Often the provisions of labour legislation are replaced by collective agreements specific to the area. In the collective agreements the employee’s position becomes both vague and weak since the provisions of labour law are subjugated to the provisions of social legislation. It may also be unclear what should be regarded as employment and who should be responsible as employer.

The purpose of this investigation is to analyse how different interests have been balanced against each other in labour law provisions concerning various “personal” or “household-related” services linked to the Social Services Act and the Act concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (LSS). Conflicts between employee rights under the labour legislation and user rights under the Social Services Act and LSS will be identified and analysed. The investigation also concerns the interfaces between labour law and work performed within a family context, assignment situations, and various forms of subsidies in this area.

Gender perspectives are central to the investigation. It is an assumption that gender perceptions have influenced the organisation and regulation of work in the referenced grey zone where interpersonal

relationships and questions of precedence and subjugation of individual interests play an important role. It is also assumed that gender perceptions were important for the emergence of the work organisation of the 1970s with its labour legislation founded on the notion of a unified collective and the conflict between labour and capital. The meeting of the two types of organisation and regulation is an aspect of the investigation.

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Child welfare and adolescent boys from a foreign background

Child protection in the context of persons with a foreign background has not been extensively explored in Sweden. In particular, adolescent boys placed in public care have very rarely been asked how they feel about measures taken by the child welfare and protection services.

The present study aims to examine the significance of a foreign background, gender and the rights of adolescent boys in care in terms of their interaction with social services. The study consists of two parts: one quantitative and one qualitative.

In the quantitative study, data concerning the children will be examined for differences between those with an “all-Swedish” and a foreign background, respectively. The database contains personal data about the children and their families and covers more than two decades. The gender issue is also a major aspect of this study. The aim is to describe children placed in care by investigating essential background characteristics relating to differences between children from a Swedish or foreign background and between boys and girls, respectively.

In the qualitative study the researchers intend to examine how child welfare authorities, the young person and his parents experience and perceive the verbal interaction between these three parties. What is the respective significance of ethnic background

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and gender in the exercise of power which placing a child in the protective care of social services constitutes?

The target group is adolescent boys from a foreign background where both parents were born in a non-European country. A foreign background is also taken to mean children born in Sweden but with at least one parent born outside Western Europe. Ten boys aged 13–19 years, their parents and their child welfare case workers will be interviewed.

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Major lottery winnings and work

This project aims to investigate how gainfully employed individuals who suddenly win large sums of money act with respect to their jobs.

The result of a major win is to reduce or even entirely eliminate the financial pressure on the individual to be at the disposal of the labour market. Winners have the option of giving up work or modifying their work in various ways, e.g. by reducing their working hours. They can also change jobs or start their own business.

The purpose of the study is to analyse what factors – besides the size of the win – are significant for the decisions taken. Among such potential factors may be mentioned age, gender, type of work, family situation and country of birth.

Another question concerns how those who choose to remain at work handle their relationships with management and co-workers. The researchers are also interested in exploring what those who give up all paid work do instead.

To find answers to these and related questions, a questionnaire survey will be conducted in the

autumn of 2005. In preparation, a small number of interviews have been carried out.

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Homosociality, power and emotional energy

A study of informal organisation, gender and interaction rituals in working organisations

It is well known that both formal and informal hierarchies exist in every organisation. Behind the formal hierarchies in multigender organisations, a different, single-gender “shadow structure” is also frequently found where women or men are excluded or downgraded.

Consequently, there is often a homosocial aspect to organisations involving single-gender rituals and meetings where power and gender structures are created and re-created both in individual organisations and in society at large.

Using an ethnographic approach to carry out participant observations and interviews in both female and male organisations and networks, the researchers wish to chart the emergence and function of such homosocial shadow structures.

The project also aims to explore how informal structures are related to and influence the formal power hierarchies. Special attention is given to the emotional aspects of homosocial rituals which have to date remained relatively unexplored.

Both female and male homosociality is examined, partly to ascertain how emotional bonds such as solidarity and loyalty are created at homosocial meetings and what effect these bonds have on power and status hierarchies in organisations.

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