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Children's mental Health with focus on family arrangements

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Abstract

The main aim of this thesis was to study children's mental health with focus on family arrangements. The thesis was based on four studies (I-IV). Study number I, III and IV were quantitative studies with cross sectional design, using the Swedish version of Health behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), including children aged 11, 13 and 15 years. The data was analysed with multiple linear regression analysis (I) and multivariate logistic regression analysis (III, IV). Study II was of qualitative descriptive design, based on 28 interviews with parents living in shared physical custody with their children. The qualitative study was analysed with inductive latent content analysis.

Study I showed that lower levels of SHC and higher levels of SWB were associated with higher degrees of social capital in the family, school and neighbourhood. Social capital in family, school and neighbourhood had a cumulative influence on children's SHC and SWB. In study II the participating parents described their own as well as the perceptions of their children and former partners. Parents' perceptions changed from the beginning of shared physical custody, through the current situation, ending with perception of the future. The fifteen year old boys and girls (III) living in shared physical custody were slightly more at risk of being a smoker or having been drunk compared with children living in two parent families. The results of sex <15 years and conduct problems showed that the risks didn't differ significantly between these two groups. Study IV showed that children living in shared physical custody with their parents were slightly more likely than children in two parent families to report multiple SHC, and low SWB. The variable of communication did not moderate the SHC and SWB of the children in any of these two groups.

This thesis contribute with new and deeper understanding of the relatively new phenomenon: shared physical custody, and its associations to children's mental health. The parent's perceptions were an important complement to the children's self reported health. In order to influence the decreasing mental health among children and adolescents, their opinions contributes to further understanding. Narratives from children, parents and practitioners are required in order to further study the association between children's health outcomes and different family arrangements. Additional studies are needed to clarify how children's mental health and different family arrangements are related to school, community economy, and society.

Keywords: Family, mental health, parents, risk behaviours, shared physical custody, social capital, subjective health complaints, subjective well- being