

A selection of comment from Swedish experts relating to the Section 59 debate

Dr Tapio Salonen
Professor Social Work,
School of Health Sciences and Social Work
Vaxjo University, Sweden

Email: Saturday 24 June 2006

"In my view Harrold-Claesson represents a quite extreme view on this matter which neither represents the official or the popular standpoint in this question in Sweden"

Dr Sune Sunesson
Professor Social Work,
Lunds University. Sweden

Email: Saturday 24 June 2006

"we have never heard of the so-called expert, Ms Claesson. The truth is that the ban against parental "smacking" is considered both good and effective".

Stina Holmberg
Criminologist
Head of department at "Brottsförebyggande rådet", the Swedish National Board for Crime Prevention, Sweden

Email: Mon 26/06/2006 21:31

"Before your e-mail I had never heard of Ruby-Harrold-Claesson, even though I have been working somewhat in this field."

Dr Christian Diesen
Professor of Procedural Law
Dep. of Law, Stockholm University

Tue 27/06/2006 01:13

"Never heard of the Swedish expert..."

Tue 27/06/2006 21:33

'Now I have checked Mrs Claesson up and remember her from a TV-debate here some years ago... She is not a member of the Swedish Bar Association and not qualified to appear as an appointed defence lawyer in criminal cases".

Margareta Hydén
Professor in Social Work
Dept. of Child Studies
Linköping University, Sweden

Email: Tue 27/06/2006 03:16

"I have received your questions about the so called Swedish expert Ms Harrold-Claesson and I like to tell you the following:

Ms Harrold-Claesson holds a Swedish degree in law, but she is not a lawyer. She is the president of the Nordic Committee for Human Rights, a two years old organisation, aimed at helping parents with children unvoluntarily placed in foster care. She has assisted two single mothers in cases against local authorities in the West of Sweden, where she has her private law practice. After that, she was excluded from practicing in courts in the West of Sweden.

Ms Harrold-Claesson was never heard of publicly until some weeks ago, when one of the major Swedish newspaper reported that she was to appear in the parliament on New Zealand (!) in pro-spanking matters and rendered some kind of expert status.

It should be noted that Ms Harrold-Claesson's group has no official status and that the comments of Ms H-C are not supported by any evidence, they are merely expressions of her personal opinions. It seems as if she runs some kind of "one person spanking lobby" in Sweden. She has declared that she herself spanked her children, and that she finds Swedish children badly behaved"

Rafael Lindqvist
Professor in Social Work
Umea University, Sweden

Email: Tue 4/07/2006 01:51

"Child abuse is not my special area of research, yet the statement by Ruby Harrold-Claesson, that policies have lead to many good Swedish parents facing criminal charges in court surprises me. In fact very few parents end up as cases in the courts and the sanctions are usually mild, i.e. the penalty would be a fine. I doubt that these parents belong to the category "good Swedish parents". I have never heard of her as an expert in this field so I take it that she is not very known in social science circles".

Gunnel Ostlund
Department of Welfare and Care,
Faculty of Health Sciences, Linköping University
Linköping University

"Ms harrold-claesson seem to be misinformed from my opinion and most people here in sweden the law has been a success".

Dr Joan Durrant
Head of the Department of Family Studies at the University of Manitoba

"While it is obvious that Ms. Harrold-Claesson cannot back up her statements, it is unfortunate that the public will only hear her rhetoric. Some astute listeners will have picked up on the vacuous nature of her arguments, but many will only have had their fears and doubts raised. This is so damaging to the prospect of intelligent debate and public education. I do hope that someone is able to effectively refute her claims and restore the debate to a level that is worthy of your public".

Email: Tue 27/06/2006 00:23

"She is actually stating that children are taken into care because of a minor smack. This is completely contrary to the entire philosophy and implementation of the Social Services Act, which is preventive and centred on keeping families together if at all possible."

Email: Tue 27/06/2006 10:09

"I am indeed familiar with Ms. Harrold-Claesson and her views. She has been saying these things for many years with the support of Ms. Siv Westerberg, who is the only other member of the Nordic Committee for Human Rights that I have come across. To the best of my knowledge, this committee has no official status but exists only to inflame fears and create divisions where none need to exist.

There are several reasons why Ms. Harrold-Claesson's statements should not be taken seriously. First, she has conducted no research nor does she cite any research to support her claims. She states only her opinions, which are quite extreme. For example, she has stated that "the repressive authorities no longer seek to fight crime in the society - the family is the main prey." This statement, which is characteristic of Ms. Harrold-Claesson's writing, is simply inflammatory. It has no basis in fact and is patently absurd. Similarly, she has stated that "during the years that have followed the anti-smacking law, hundreds, maybe thousands, of parents have been prosecuted, fined and sentenced to prison for smacking their unruly children. The children have in most cases been removed from their "abusive" parents and put into foster homes. This has caused the total break-up of those families. The police and prosecutors have gone out after parents who discipline their children instead of attending to other crimes in the society." Ms. Harrold-Claesson provides no evidence for her wildly distorted claims. She simply makes them regardless of their veracity.

Second, most of what she claims to be true is actually false. For example, she has stated that, "many Swedish parents are therefore afraid of their children and dare not correct them for fear of being reported to the police, indicted and fined or sent to prison." In fact, studies of Swedish parents show quite the opposite to be true. Not only are they quite willing to admit when they have smacked a child (albeit with deep regret), they also tend to be exemplary of the "authoritative" (warmth and structure) parenting style that has been recommended by parenting researchers on the basis of decades of research findings. If you wish, I can send you references. Ms. Harrold-Claesson makes other claims about the rate of child abuse increasing 489%, Swedish youth becoming unruly, and thousands of prosecutions of parents for smacking their children, all of which are contradicted by the evidence.

Third, she confounds the Parents' Code, the Penal Code, the Social Services Act and the Care of Young Persons Act. For example, she writes about parents who are "victimised under the 1979 law" and "social authorities and courts who enforce the law concerning the child's right

not to be subjected to physical punishment." In fact, the 1979 ban (which came 22 years after repeal of the criminal defence) is not "enforceable." It is in the Parents' Code, which carries no penalties. Its purpose was solely to educate and raise awareness. It was specifically designed in this way so that it could not lead to punishment of parents".

Stina Johansson
Professor in Social Work
Umea University, Sweden

Email: Tue 4/07/2006 02:25

"The only thing I can say is that this "expert" expresses attitudes towards "human rights" which is not representative for Swedes in general. I went to her website and I was really shocked. Please let me take another look at this and come back to you".

Email: Thu 6/07/2006 20:42

"I have started some research on Ruby Harrold-Claesson, a person which nobody seems to know anything about. I have asked persons at my Department (Social Work), I have asked medical doctors and also other persons working in the field. I can say this person is not known except within a very small circle".

Dr Gunvor Andersson
Socialhögskolan
Lunds University, Sweden

Gunvor Andersson, Ph.D. in psychology and senior lecturer in social work, works at Lund University in Sweden, School of Social Work, where her research work is financed by the Swedish Council for Social Research. Her doctoral dissertation was about small children in a children's home (1984). She has also published a follow-up study of children who have been separated from their parents (1988) and a book about social workers' child welfare work, Social Work with Small Children (1991).

Email: Fri 30/06/2006 08:40

"I have never heard about Ruby Harrold-Claesson. The anti-smacking law is not controversial in Sweden and have led to changed attitudes among people in general in the direction that smacking is not seen as a method for upbringing. It is not true that the removal of smacking rights has led to many good Swedish parents facing criminal charges in court. Parents are not prosecuted for smacking - and there is some criticism that it is a law without sanctions - but parents can be prosecuted for assault and battery"