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Quality of employment in childcare

Country report: Sweden

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Introduction

In Sweden, preschool has been a key factor in the development of society and has been a part of strengthening the political agenda (Hägglund & Pramling Samuelsson, 2009). The Swedish government spends 1.3% of GDP on preschool a year (European Commission, 2014).). In 2016, there were more than 500,000 children enrolled in preschools, with almost 95 % of children aged 4-5 years attending preschools (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2017). Preschool therefore emerges as an important topic for society, especially parents and politicians who frequently debate the issues of preschool in the media (Pramling Samuelsson et al. 2014).

According to the school law, which entered into force on 1 July 2011, preschool is a separate school form and is part of the school system. In both the school day and the revised curriculum (curriculum was revised in 2018), the role of preschool teacher has been strengthened. The municipalities are required to provide preschool for children between the ages of 1 to 5 years. The obligation also includes children whose parents are unemployed or who are parental for a sibling. These children should be offered a place in preschool at least Three hours a day or 15 hours a week. The municipalities will also offer preschool to all children for at least 525 free hours from the autumn semester in the year the child is 3 years old (general preschool) (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2017. Night preschools are also available in 120 municipalities to cater for parents who work at night.

Attendance in early childhood education and care

Almost all 4 and 5 year old children attend preschool (95%) (Skolverket, 2016). The vast majority of preschool children attend preschool on a full time base, with the average usage for children aged under 5 at 33 hours per week. The full time participation of children in preschool allows the maternal employment rate to be around 80% (OECD, 2014). If children are not enrolled in preschool they may participate in family day care or be cared for by a parent or relative at home. Given that Swedish parents have 480 of parental leave, children do not start preschool before the age of 1 year. Table 1 provides a summary of early childhood education and care.

Table 1. Summary of early childhood education and care in Sweden.

	Under 3 years old	Older then 3 years old
Use of formal early childhood education and care	86% preschool 2% family daycare	95% preschool 2% family day care
Use of other arrangements (family, friends, home based care)	Parents who draw on childcare allowance (2.5%)	Parents who draw on childcare allowance (2.5%)

Types of preschools in Sweden

There are three types of preschools in Sweden. The first is preschools that are run by the municipality. There is usually a preschool director from the municipality who will oversee the running of 3-4 preschools in a neighbouring area. The second type is independent preschools that may be for profit or non-for profit. The preschools receive their funding from the municipality and cannot charge parents fees above the rate of the municipality preschools.

The third type is parent cooperatives that are again fully integrated into the universal, public system of childcare where the municipalities again provide funding. Parents play an important role in the running of the preschool and are expected to invest time volunteering. Independent preschools and parent cooperative preschools are run according to the same rules and regulations as public preschools and abide by national laws and guidelines. Parents can choose which type of preschool they would like their child to attend.

Across Sweden there are 9800 preschools. Seventy-three percent of these preschools are run by the local municipality, while 27% were run by private administration (Skolverket, 2016). Private administration could include independent schools (for profit and not-for-profit) and parents co-operatives. One out of every five children attended an independent preschool in Sweden. Independent preschools are found in suburban and metropolitan municipalities (where at least 33% of enrolled children attend an independent preschool). In one municipality, 93% of children attend an independent preschool (Skolverket, 2017a).

Staff in preschools

In Swedish preschools, it is the role of teachers and staff to stimulate, and support children's development and learning. Preschool teachers work with child assistants in teams to support children's learning. There is an overall preschool director in charge of the team. In 2011, requirements for preschool teacher credentials were introduced in order to be employed without a time limit. In 2016 there were 105, 800 adults employed to work in preschools (Skolverket, 2017a). Around 39% of preschool employees have an accepted teacher qualification (3.5 years university degree), which is a decline of 3% from the previous year (Skolverket, 2017a). Around 95% of these employees had a preschool teacher qualification, 2% had a teacher qualification and 3% had a leisure time centre teacher qualification.

In Sweden, the assistants complete a three-year upper secondary vocational training in childcare and leisure-time studies (ISCED 3A), enabling them to work as support staff in early childhood centres (förskolan) for 1-5-year-olds and in school-age childcare facilities (Peeters, Sharmahd & Budginaite, 2016). . The assistants have a social pedagogical role which includes caring and teaching. In 2016, 20.4% of preschool staff in the municipality preschools had an assistant qualification and 18.6% of preschool staff in independent preschools had an assistant qualification (Skolverket, 2017). Child assistants are the second largest occupational group among members of the municipality and the fourth largest occupational group in Sweden.. Among other things, the work involves creating conditions that support the child's development, learning, play and communication. Individual planning is required for each child. Participating in sleep hours, meals, play indoors and outdoors, and parents' meetings, parent meetings and documentation are included in the duties. They have an invaluable role in preschool, as part of the work team.

Of concern from data collected about preschool employees, around 28% of staff working in the preschool did not have any education in working with children (increase of 3% from the previous year) (Skolverket, 2017a). In independent schools, the proportion of staff without experience was 40%, while in municipality preschools it was closer to 25%. The highest proportion of staff (50%) with qualifications were found in rural municipalities, while in large city areas the percentage was around 30% of staff (Skolverket, 2017a).

In 2016, most preschool staff were female (96%), with only 4% being men (Skolverket, 2017). The percentages have been largely constant over the past ten years. Around 46% of men lack formal educational qualifications for working with children (Skolverket, 2017a). More men work in independent preschools (6.3%) compared to municipality preschools (3.9%) (Skolverket, 2017a). The discussion of men in preschool is a topic that is discussed in the media. Neighbouring countries like Norway have made extensive efforts to encourage more males into preschool teacher education programmes. Similar programmes have not been implemented in Sweden.

The role of the preschool director is to support the pedagogical work, management of the preschool and educational development. In Sweden there are around 4800 preschool directors. The majority of directors are female, with only 6.9% of directors male (Skolverket, 2017a). On average, a preschool director manages two preschool units. Preschool directors working in municipality preschools on average have twice as more preschool units to manage (2.8 units) compared to preschool directors in independent preschools (1.2 units) (Skolverket, 2017a).

The role of the preschool head is the overall running and management of the preschool. In 2016 there were 2300 preschool heads (förskolehuvudmän) (Skolverket, 2017a). Of these, 290 were municipality preschool heads and 2000 were individual preschool heads. The preschool heads work with differing numbers of children. Eight out of ten principals had an average of 50 children or less enrolled in a preschool. The largest single preschool head was in charge of 8, 300 children in Pyslingen. Out of the 9,800 preschool units, 72% were managed by a municipality preschool head (7,100 preschool units) while 28% (2, 700 preschool units) were independent preschools heads (Skolverket, 2017a).

Around 6900 staff looked after preschool classes across Sweden (Skolverket, 2016). About eight out of every ten adults had a higher education qualification in education (such as a Bachelor degree). The remaining 20% did not have a higher education qualification. There was an average of 16.5 students per a preschool class. Ten years ago, the corresponding figure was 14.1 (Skolverket, 2016).

The amount of qualified staff (teachers and assistants) working in preschools appears problematic in certain locations across Sweden. Findings suggest that middle socio-economic areas have staff with more qualifications than low socio-economic areas, leading to variation in quality.

A summary of the roles in the preschool is provided in table 2 below.

Table 2. Preschool roles

Occupation	Present in facilities (under 3 years old)	Present in facilities (over 3 years old)	Tasks
Preschool teacher	Yes	Yes	Pedagogical planning, learning, supervision, documentation, reporting, cleaning
Child assistants	Yes	Yes	Support the work of the teacher, learning, supervision, documentation, reporting, cleaning
Preschool relief (vikare)	Yes	Yes	Relief duties
Preschool director	Yes	Yes	Administration, budgets, staffing, reporting, leadership

Most Swedish parents today choose preschool for day care and are satisfied. In 2013 a survey of parents of 124,000 children by the Swedish National Agency for Education revealed that 90 percent felt that the staff did a good job, their children were safe and the preschool pedagogy met their expectations. Also at local level parents seem to be satisfied with preschool. In the city of Gothenburg a survey, answered by 11,000 parents with children in preschools and family day-care, show that parents find preschool fun, safe and instructive, that the staffs takes good care of the children and that the children learn to collaborate with peers in groups (GR, 2016). However, parents were dissatisfied with the group size, that there are too many children in each group (Pramling Samuelsson, Sheridan, Williams, & Nasiopoulou, 2014). Parents also experience limited possibilities to influence the preschool practice and the information between the staff and to the parents is lacking. Another deficiency pointed out was that parents found it difficult to assess the *children's potentials* to influence preschool activities and how the children developed their understanding of areas such as science and mathematics.

Sickness among preschool staff is also another reported problem leading to large absences from staff. When this occurs the preschool director needs to find relief staff. If relief staff are not available, the preschool may need to close for the day or parents may need to take over supervision of the children.

Preschool teachers and assistants in Sweden are generally well respected, with public trust in preschools high. Preschool teachers and assistants will have regular communication with families and work with other agencies in the municipality.

One problem however is that employers have difficulty recruiting child assistants who have the required training. The lack of trained staff has been documented by Kommunal (union)

in the report “Your Child’s Future” (Kommunal, 2018). In 2016, almost 30% of preschool staff had no formal qualification to work with children Sweden’s municipalities organisation (SKL) estimates that there needs to be an annual recruitment of 2000-3000 assistants until 2022. The problem with staffing creates problems for maintaining and improving the quality of preschool and directly impacts the child’s individual needs. With limited staff qualifications, another problem is the actual implementation of the preschool curriculum (Kommunal, 2018).

Section 1: Anchors of employment quality: High Road vs. Load Road

Sweden has a very developed paid parental leave scheme that encourages both parents to spend time with their children. Paid parental leave was introduced in 1974. Together the mother and the father are entitled to up to 16 months of paid leave per child (480 days). Close to 90 per cent of fathers also take paid parental leave. Thirteen months are funded by the government at 80% of the parents’ wage, with the remaining three months paid at 180SEK per day. Each parent has a non-transferable entitlement of 2 months, meaning paid parental leave must be shared (currently 3 months is being discussed in government). Both parents can take 30 days at the same time. To encourage both parents to be involved in caring of the child, a gender equality bonus was introduced in 2008. Parents who both take leave are entitled to the extra bonus. Such a scheme recognises the importance of shared parenting and allows all parents the opportunity to participate.

In 2012, the employment rate for women was 71.8%, close to men’s participation rates in the workforce of 75.6% (European Commission, 2014). The employment rate of mothers of children aged under six is the third highest in the European Union. The gender pay gap in Sweden is also lower than the European Union average (European Commission, 2014).

In Sweden, the political goals for preschool and the Swedish welfare system have changed over time. The role of the preschool has been dependent on which groups in society have been targeted by policies. The role of preschool has varied between; (a) being a strategy to support the labour market (arbetsmarknadsåtgärd), (b) a strategy to achieve gender equality in society, (given women the possibility to work) (jämställdhetsmål), or (c) a strategy in the field of education (utbildningsinsats) (Skans, 2011). Today, the state (national levels) determines the overall goals and guidelines for the education system, while municipalities are responsible for the implementation of the goals and strategies. Municipalities must follow the national curriculum and provide a foundation for determining if independent preschools fulfill stipulated requirements. The governance of independent preschools is controlled by the municipality.

The strong relation between the aim of the preschool and the welfare state was also manifested through that responsibility for the preschool being at the Ministry of Social Welfare (and not the Ministry of Education during 1972 to 1996). As part of the social welfare service, the preschool was viewed as a complement to the family, supporting the child’s socialisation to become a part of society. As such, preschool was part of the general support system directed at the family (Skans, 2011). The preschool was also viewed as support to individual children and parents. Access to the preschool for children growing up in disadvantaged families and under rough conditions was used as support by (*socialsekretare*) social workers to support this child and their families. During the late

1980s, there was a shift to a greater focus on learning as opposed to care. However, the perspective that the preschool's overall aim was socialisation still dominated policy and public debate (Lunneblad, 2006).

In 1996, the governance of preschool shifted from the Ministry of Social Welfare to the Ministry of Education. The recommendations from the Ministry of Social Welfare about content, pedagogy and leadership were replaced by a national curriculum under the control of the Ministry of Education. A stronger focus on education was seen within preschools.

According to the school law, which entered into force on 1 July 2011, preschool is a separate school form and is part of the school system. In both the school day and the revised curriculum, the role of preschool teacher and assistant has been strengthened.

The municipalities are required to provide preschool for all children between the ages of 1 to 5 years. The obligation also includes children whose parents are unemployed or who are on parental leave with another child. All children have the right to at least three hours a day or 15 hours a week of preschool. The municipalities will also offer preschool to all children for at least 525 free hours from the autumn semester in the year the child is 3 years old (general preschool) (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2017). Night preschools (overnight care) are also available in 120 municipalities to cater for parents who work at night (available only to parents who are employed in nighttime professions who require care). Night time preschools are not common compared to day preschools. However they are provided to allow all parents the opportunity to work, regardless of work hours. Children will generally have dinner and sleep at the preschool, before being picked up by the parent in the morning.

In August 2018, a revised curriculum was implemented for preschool (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). The changes are about achieving an equivalent quality at all pre-schools all over the country. To achieve this, the document seeks to provide more clarity. There are two new chapters, firstly about evaluation and development and about the role of the preschool director. The goals around language and communication, mathematics, science and technology have been supplemented and developed.

The Teachers Union was critical in the initial draft about the role of the preschool teacher as the only provider of teaching in the preschool day. Since then the government changed in the final version and also recognised the important role that assistants play in supporting children's learning. The document recognises that many people participate in the teaching such as teachers, assistants and others to promote children's learning and development. As such, preschool teachers, assistants and other staff need to have the necessary skills to ensure competency development to allow them to perform their duties.

In 1999, a statutory right was implemented to extend early childhood education for all children, including children of unemployed and non-working parents. The right required municipalities to provide a place for every child from one year of age within 3 months of applying for a preschool place. Preschool for children aged four and five became free of charge. In 2000 the national government set limits for parental fees, called the 'max-tax', to ensure affordability for all parents. Parental fees for preschool became differentiated on

income and did not exceed three per cent of family income for the first child, two percent of income for the second child and one percent for the third child (Skolverket, 2007). No fees are charged for further children.

The maximum fee has improved the financial situation for most families in Sweden, where nearly all families gained from the introduction of the bill (Skolverket, 2014). The cost to families has decreased significantly and provided opportunities for parents to work or study. This means that nearly all children can attend preschool because of low cost preschools, regardless of parent income or location.

Parent fees do not cover the entire cost of a child to attend preschool. The remaining amount is subsidised by the municipality. The cost of a child in preschool during 2016 was 144,300 SEK, which is an increase of 2.7% from the previous year (Skolverket, 2016). The municipality receives funding from the state. The municipality also receives funding from local taxation. The municipalities are free to use funds as they choose, as long as local services, preschools, schools, aged care and social services follow national standards. This means that each municipality makes decisions about preschools in their area.

Funds for preschool generally cover all aspects of the daily running of the preschool, including staff costs, building costs, food costs, cleaning costs, maintenance costs, heating costs and resources for the preschool. Funding is not determined by provider type. In practice, this means that each preschool unit gets its' own budget. As such, preschool directors calculate how many children are needed in groups to cover costs.

While policies have provided families with the opportunity to send children to preschool, problems emerge around actual access to preschool places and the subsequent quality in the preschool. Since municipalities are required to offer a place to children within 3 months, this has led to increased group size in preschools (number of children to teachers) leading to greater stress and work for teachers. The problem is a popular topic in the Swedish media. Problems of supervision, safety and the quality of learning have also emerged based on teacher and parent concern. There are currently no legislated ratios for groups sizes in Sweden, with size dependent on the municipality. Teachers do not have a say in the number of children in their group.

The governance of ECEC services in Sweden is stipulated at the national level but implemented and controlled at the municipality level. This means that while there are national requirements around access to preschool, it is the municipality who provides the overall access to ECEC for children. Each municipality is different because of the decentralised approach in Sweden where municipalities provide services based on the needs of the community. Services are funded through tax. Each municipality has a different income taxation rate.

According to the School Act, the municipality will also offer the child a place at a preschool within four months of when the parent has lodged an application. Parents register with their local municipality by providing their child's personal number (a national identification number) and selecting five preschools they would like their child to attend. Despite the fact that municipalities are to offer a place within four months, the actual waiting period can be

both shorter and longer than the four months, depending on availability. Earlier surveys show that between 1995 and 2009, there were between 10 and 50 municipalities that did not offer parents a preschool space for their child on time, i.e. within 4 months of application (SOU 2013:41. *Förskolegarantin*). Some parents who are not given a preschool place for their child will seek independent preschools or parent co-operative preschools.

The Swedish educational system is highly decentralised and gives the preschool directors on a local level significant responsibility and freedom of action. However, the preschool director's responsibility and the accountability for this position is regulated in the educational act, regardless of preschool type (cooperative, private or a preschool run by the municipality). Each preschool unit can have one preschool director who is responsible. While it is not compulsory to have graduated from a national principal program, the majority of preschool directors have graduated from the program. It is compulsory for principals working in schools and high schools to have graduated from the national principal program.

Quality monitoring

Quality monitoring also occurs across the Swedish municipalities. Each municipality implements quality monitoring in different ways. Across all municipalities however there are some basic foundations. For example, independent preschools are closely supervised and monitored. For independent schools, the municipality supervises and provides quality monitoring. Each year, all independent preschools are required to report to the municipality a number of different factors. These include personal density (how many children in relation to the numbers of staff), proportion of preschool teachers, employee turnover and a rapport that's verify that's the environment is safe for the children. For municipality preschools, the School Inspection agency is responsible for supervision. The inspections that the School inspection carry out are on a municipality level or a district level depending on the size of the city or the municipality. During 2015-2017, the School Inspection, on behalf of the Swedish government, conducted a large inspection of preschools and their management across Sweden. The aim of the large inspection was to draw attention to important areas of improvement needed within preschools.

Most preschools also implement a staff survey each year. The survey is completed by employers who comment about their work environment. Similar to the quality reports created, findings are dependent on the professionals' ability to transfer private experiences into a perspective of strength and weakness for an organisation.

Another way to measure quality in preschool is the parental questionnaire that parents answer each year. The questions concern how parents' perceive their child's social environment and the quality of the preschool's learning environment. The weakness of the questionnaire as a measure of quality is that many parents have little experience with Swedish preschools and have limited knowledge about the objectives of preschool. It is difficult for parents who lack knowledge about preschool pedagogy to identify preschool activities that are related to the preschool learning objectives. Often response rates are also lower in areas where parents have a different mother tongue to Swedish, and have relatively low educational attainment levels. This means that the way the local objectives are set and quality is measured are dependent on well-educated pedagogies and conscious and

interested parents. There is a clear risk that parents with immigrant backgrounds are disadvantaged by the current ways of measuring quality.

In quality monitoring, individual achievements of children are not measured in Sweden. Likewise, it is not common to isolate children from a disadvantaged background within the quality monitoring background as identification based on demographic characteristics being uncommon. Monitoring is therefore dependent on the goals set within each municipality based on the needs of the community.

Preschool teacher education

In 2011 a new teacher education program (3.5 years) was introduced (SOU 2008; Lärautbildningsnämnden, 2011; 2013) that consisted of four new teacher education programmes. Preschool teacher education was one of these programmes. The focus of both the revised curriculum and the new teacher education programme is clearly on content areas such as language, mathematics, technology and science, as well as documentation, evaluation and didactical issues. The ambition was to make preschool more pedagogical in the sense that it was more oriented to teaching and learning. The 2011 programme changed back the name from *teacher of early years* to *preschool teacher*. Graduates (Degree: Bachelor of Arts) were awarded a preschool teacher degree that would allow them to work in a preschool with children aged one to five years and also in preschool class (6 years of age).

Professional learning after recruitment is dependent on the preschool and the municipality. Different regions will focus on different areas of learning and provide professional learning in different areas. Some staff can also choose to continue with higher education if they would like to enter into leadership roles (though this is not compulsory).

Assistant education

In Sweden, assistants are required to follow a three. year upper secondary vocational education specialising in pedagogical work. The aim is to prepare students for working alongside preschool teachers in early childhood settings. The education consists of compulsory and options courses focusing on child development, learning ,ends and rights of the child as well as other educational activities (Lohmander, 2017). During the qualification, 15 weeks of placement is undertaken. Students are then prepared for work in either a preschool or school. Together with assessing the theoretical courses, the student's abilities to perform common tasks in the professional field are also assessed (Skolverket 2011).

Role of trade unions

Sweden is one of the countries with the highest level of unionisation in the world. Trade unions play a major role and many people see collective agreements and being a union member as part of working life. There are a number of teaching unions that preschool staff can join. Unions are responsible for checking the conditions of work as a teacher as well as the negotiations of collective agreements. Unions also support members with employment protection.

Unions regularly survey and report on the working conditions of members. In a 2015 report from Lärarförbundet (2015) it was reported that in order to improve the work situation for preschool teachers and attract more people to the profession, seven areas of improvement were needed:

1. Increase teacher density
2. Reduce group sizes
3. A revision of tasks conducted by the preschool teacher
4. Add more resources to children in need of special support
5. Provide career services in preschool
6. Focus on skills development
7. Increase wages to recruit and retain preschool teachers

The focus was to show the working conditions of preschool teachers and highlight current tensions faced by many members.

The Kommunal (union) has also provided suggestions for improvement following a 2017 survey of child assistants. These are the most important measures considered by the municipality to improve the children's preschool environment and reduce stress and fatigue for preschool staff. These are (Kommunal, 2018, p. 8):

- 1) The preschool team should be sufficient based on the size and composition of the children's group. The work environment and premise should also be given sufficient consideration in the preschool team.
- 2) The size of the children's group in preschool should follow the Skolverket's guidelines at 6-12 children per group for children aged between 1-3 years and 9-15 children for children aged between 4-5 years.
- 3) In order to reduce the workload in preschools, the proportion of permanent staff needs to be increased. A high proportion of fixed-term (contract) preschool staff causes reduce continuity of care and increases the workload for regular/permanent preschool staff.

The unions have been important for shaping the quality of education in preschools for teachers and assistants. For example, in 2011, both Kommunal and Lärarförbundet wrote a joint letter to all municipalities about the new schooling and curriculum. It emphasized that different skills in preschool complement and enrich each other. The letter also called for the roles of each member in the preschool to be clarified, based on the new steering documents. This joint letter demonstrated the importance of the unions working together to help support different staff working in preschool.

With the revision of the curriculum in 2018, the unions again played an important role. The Unions were able to provide suggestions to the government about necessary changes needed around the role of staff and also create a strong understanding of the role of child assistants in the curriculum.

The municipalities have the task of negotiating with the unions about the employee's wages. However, because of the individual payroll system, preschools in the same district can be

competing for staff through different salaries. This means salaries can vary by type of preschool (public vs private) as well as the location (different municipalities have different salaries). Broadly speaking, the decentralization of the public sector has meant that preschools today are characterized by municipal organisation, which is perhaps more similar to a company where market terms are becoming more common.

Collective agreements differ depending on the type of preschool and the municipality (based on organisation). Teachers' salaries are set individually based on competence, qualifications, experience, the market situation and how the work is carried out. As previously stated, teachers in different municipalities can be paid different amounts. Sometimes outdoor clothes and shoes are provided or subsidized by the employer. For teachers working fulltime, 40 hours a week is usual in many collective agreements. Some preschools however have fewer hours as a way to recruit staff.

Pedagogical development time is an important consideration for working time. This is time for planning, meeting and other tasks associated with teaching. Teachers will often have a schema of tasks that is negotiated. Preschool teachers do not require a second job, as in other countries to survive financially.

Section 2: Outcome: Well-being of childcare staff

In Sweden, preschool teachers are subject to work related stress. In a study conducted by the Swedish Teacher's Union (Läraryrket, 2015), preschool teachers are eighty per cent more likely to suffer from psychological illness and 55 per cent more likely to be ill than the average worker. The Swedish Work Environment Authority (Arbetsmiljöverket, 2011) suspects this is related to high stress level, noise levels and physical demands on the body within the preschool. Swedish statistics on preschools teachers align with this suspicion regarding risk factors for long-term sick leave (more than 90 days) due to psychological ill health (depression, stress, anxiety and burnout) with preschool teachers having the fourth highest risk factor (8 per 1000 employees) of all professions (AFA-Insurance, 2014).

The working environments in Swedish preschools have also been explored and show that the sound level contributes to hearing-related ill health (Grebennikov, 2006; Sjödin, Kjellberg, Knutsson, Lindberg, & Landström, 2012). Some studies have shown that preschool teachers and assistants have an increased risk of hearing-related symptoms, which may be caused by the work environment (Fredriksson et al., 2016). Given the risks, some staff may leave the profession to pursue better working environments. There are limited statistics however on the drop-out rate of preschool staff. There is also limited statistics on the drug and alcohol use abuse of preschool staff.

The shift in preschool staffs' well-being can be linked to the organizational change that has occurred in recent years. The focus has shifted from being a provider of quality care to teaching environments with different pedagogic aims (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2010). The stronger focus on learning, planning and documentation has also been alongside increases in group size (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2014). Preschool staff must support positive interactions with more children across the preschool day and provide on-task support for these children. Previous research has found that interactions are a major contributor to overall job satisfaction among teachers (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014)

however this was before over extended group sizes. Currently, 29% of assistants suggest that the preschool team is insufficient each day for the size of the group of children. Six out of ten preschool departments exceed Skolverket's guidelines for group size for children (Kommunal, 2018). This increased the stress of assistants and lead to unsafe work environments.

The organization of the preschool appears a central factor to stress experienced by preschool teachers. In a recent study using cortisol samples, Sjödin & Neely (2017) found that high-stress preschool staff had more communications from colleagues and spent more time on pedagogical planning. This suggests that they spent less time working with the children because of other activities. In observations, Sjödin and Neely (2017) also observed that high-stress staff had colleagues who often sought them out for communication, suggesting colleagues relied on them in their daily work to achieve outcomes. Again, this provided more stress for the preschool staff who appeared to take more responsibility at work.

Stress was also found in a recent survey by the Kommunal (2018, p. 5) of child assistants. The key findings showed that 39% of child assistants said the work was mentally draining on a daily basis (an increase since 2012) and that 45% of the child assistants were considering leaving the profession. Moreover, 74% of child assistants said that their workplace has problems with noise, including excessive noise. This is worrying, given that research has shown that problematic noise can lead to hearing loss, higher blood pressure and increased heart rate.

In the Kommunal survey (2018), because of the increased stress of working in preschools, 14% of child assistants did not know if they wanted to work in a preschool three years from now. Of this group, 29% of permanent and educated child assistants said they did not want to continue working in a preschool three years from now because of the mental stress.

According to the Kommunal (2018), the problem with stress and unhealthy work environments in preschool is that it has negative consequences for the staff, the children and the employers. There is also a big loss of experienced and knowledgeable staff when preschool teachers and assistants choose to quit or are on sick leave. Staff changes are also time consuming for employers and directors, also contributing to overall problems of quality and continuity of planning.

Preschool staff also generally work in teams within the work environment. Results show a strong relationship between the effectiveness of the preschool teams and well-being, both with regards to levels of emotional exhaustion and work satisfaction (Jacobsson, Åkerlund, Graci, Cedstrand & Archer, 2016). This suggests that more effective teamwork was associated with lower levels of emotional exhaustion and higher levels of work satisfaction for preschool staff. As such, membership in effective teams in preschool may promote health and psychological well-being among staff.

Preschool directors are also influenced by changing environments. In a recent study of municipality preschool directors, Lunneblad and Garvis (2017) found that preschool director roles have been strongly influenced by new public management ideals. Preschool directors

had to take on roles of being a coach, but at the same time be the 'ultimate boss' in decisions for the preschool. This was difficult as it influenced trust between the director and preschool teacher. Accountability also emerged as an important topic with preschool directors having to defend decisions to parents about group size, qualifications of the staff and amount of learning activities possible because of budgetary decisions. Preschool directors also spoke about the importance of the public image to parents and the role of the parent satisfaction survey in making decisions in the preschool. Limited data is available on the role of preschool directors in private preschools however it can be assumed that they are also influenced by new public management ideals, including strong accountability to parents.

Group size (number of children to staff) is an important contributor to the work environment for all preschool staff. Group size is dependent on the region. Currently, large preschool groups are reported in Swedish media as a concern from parents and teachers. Municipalities can choose group size within each of the preschools. Often decisions about group size are based on economic situations in the municipality or meeting the requirements or offering all parents a preschool place within the given time frame. Sometimes it can be too expensive to employ an extra adult to decrease the group size ratio. Of concern is that in a recent school inspection survey of preschools (Skolinspektionen, 2016a), it was also found that only one third of municipalities in Sweden took socio-economic factors into account when allocating money to preschool for the year (Skolinspektionen, 2016b). These municipalities were usually larger in size and had a socioeconomic distribution model. The remaining two thirds of municipalities made funding decisions about preschools regardless of socio-economic status, without a socioeconomic distribution model. If a preschool required more resources because of the socio-economic status (including characteristics of the school population such as migrant background), this was not considered in the decision making for the year.

Section 3: Employment quality of childcare workers

Job demands

Preschool staff work in teams within each of the preschools. The role of the preschool director is to support the pedagogical work, management of the preschool and educational development. The preschool teachers organizes pedagogical learning and plans appropriate learning experiences. Tasks for the preschool team are varied depending on the needs of the group and the age of the children. Some preschool groups are organized within age ranges (example- 1-2 year olds, 3-5 years olds), individual age groups (example- 5 year olds) or have all age ranges (1-5 years) in a group. Variation also occurs within the preschool team. For example, if a preschool teacher is away from the group and there is a substitute, the other two permanent staff may take on different tasks and roles throughout the day. Preschool staff will generally have a schema that has been negotiated to plan out their week and month (planning time, staff meetings), however, this can change because of changes to the work environment.

Growing group sizes create problems with planning and job tasks for many preschool groups. Recently the Swedish Teachers Union (2018) reported that preschool teachers felt there was a lack of opportunity to do a good job for every child because of the changing work

conditions. Suggested reasons alongside growing group size was lack of planning time, limited time for collaboration and lack of money. The Union also reported that preschool teachers were forced to prioritize administration and cleaning over planning and development for the children, contributing to a waste of the teachers' skill and learning ability.

Another problem raised by child assistants (Kommunal, 2018) was the lack of breaks and rest in the preschool. Time for rests and breaks during the work day are important for a good working environment, and important for both physical and mental recovery. According to Swedish Labor laws (Arbetstidslagen 15-17 §), all workers are entitled to take breaks as needed during the day, as well as taking a longer break after working the longest in five hours. In the Kommunal survey (2018), 35% of assistants said it was difficult to take short breaks (such as going to the bathroom) at least one day a week, while 18% of assistants said it was difficult to take breaks daily. Meanwhile, 35% of assistants had difficulty having access to a longer break once a week (such as a lunch break), while 18% of assistants reported daily difficulty in having a longer break. The limited access to breaks highlights the immense stress and workload preschool staff are under with the heavy responsibility of children. Staff do not want to leave colleagues alone with a large group of children in case something might happen.

In 2017, The Kommunal also reported that an increasing number of assistants felt the staffing numbers at preschools were so low that is posed a risk to child safety every week (three out of 10 respondents) . Meanwhile 10% of assistants said the risk was every day. Fifty-six per cent of assistants working at preschools further indicated that preschools lack or do not follow guidelines on the size of the children's groups (Kommunal, 2017). .The lack of staff creates stress and poor working conditions for the preschool team, as well as creating fears for child safety.

The preschool team is crucial to ensuring a safe learning environment for children. There is a need for smaller group sizes to allow the preschool team to be present in the children's play, interactions and daily routines. If there is not enough staff, the mental and physical environment will deteriorate (Kommunal, 2017). Greater focus is therefore needed on increasing the number of preschool staff. The Kommunal (2017) advocate that the child assistant shortage can be broken through improved occupational status, occupational development, better working environments and safer employment conditions.

Preschool staff generally do not have difficulty with parents or children. Parents in survey usually report positively towards the preschool environment.

Job controls

Preschool staff can control their own work and choose their own approach. Staff work in teams and communicate daily. Feedback is also given from parents in a yearly survey about the preschool. The questions concern how parents' perceive their child's social environment and the quality of the preschool's learning environment.

At the end of the year, the professionals at each of the different levels write a report about the work they have done to ensure that the goals are accomplished in the preschool. The

need for area of development are also identified with an organisational plan create to meet challenges. The strength with this highly decentralised way of governance is that the professionals on each level have the possibility to identify the local needs of the group. A weakness is that the decentralised approach relies on professionals having the competence to articulate the challenges they confront in the implementation of policy.

Wage setting for preschool staff is usually done on an individual level with assistance from the union in a wage talk. There is no national standard for wages however information about wages are collected and shared within the unions (the wages are from staff who work in both private and public preschools). Wage statistics are useful for wage discussions and provide information about wages based on age, education, degree year, municipality and occupational group. In the comparative agreements there are rules that govern working hours, overtime and irregular working hours. If a teacher works overtime they are compensated with either more income or free hours. For overtime work in excess of two hours, the multiplier for income and free hours increases (for example, hourly wage is multiplied by 2.4 or 2 free hours for every hour worked).

Working time depends on the preschool (municipality as well as private/public). The standard for full time work is a 40 hour week, however some preschools offer 35 hours full time working week in an effort to attract staff. The remaining 5 hours can be used for health promotion and lifestyle activities (meditation, walking, mindfulness). Preschool teachers can also choose to work part-time and are protected by Swedish law in regards to working part-time, especially when children are young.

Preschool teachers can have career opportunities of becoming preschool directors. There is a training program at universities for leadership that school leaders also undertake. Staff who do not have a bachelor qualification as a preschool teacher can also be supported to become a qualified preschool teacher to progress their career.

Social support

With regards to social support, preschool staff have meetings with the preschool directors to discuss workloads and the working environment. Preschool staff can also meet with the safety representative to discuss the working environment and members from the union. If there are problems or conflicts, usually these will be assisted by others in the relationship such as the safety representative or the union.

Preschool staff can make decisions about pedagogical delivery and approach. Decisions about finance however are made by the preschool director the municipality.

Section 2 has identified some of the risks associated with working in preschools. This includes excess noise and stress related to work tasks such as responding to large group sizes. The state of preschool infrastructure is standard and meets the requirements and guidelines of the municipalities. Infrastructure is also monitored by the preschool director and preschool head (huvudsman) (head who oversees preschools). The role of the head is to ensure all rules and regulations are abided by in the organization and delivery of preschool services.

Each municipality implements quality monitoring in different ways. Across all municipalities however there are some basic foundations. For example, independent preschools are closely supervised and monitored. For independent schools, the municipality supervises and provides quality monitoring. Each year, all independent preschools are required to report to the municipality a number of different factors. These include personal density (how many children in relation to the numbers of staff), proportion of preschool teachers, employee turnover and a rapport that's verify that's the environment is safe for the children. For municipality preschools, the School Inspection agency is responsible for supervision. The inspections that the School inspections are carried out on a municipality or a district level depending on the size of the city or the municipality.

Most preschools also implement a staff survey each year. The survey is completed by employers who comment about their work environment.

Occupational safety is evaluated in different ways. Once a year a safety control takes place and a protocol after the control is typed and filed. Remarks are addressed as quickly as possible, within a reasonable period of time. Occupational safety is also discussed at staff meetings each month, depending on the organisation of the preschool. There are also safety representatives in work environment management.

External support

As preschool is part of the education system, staff can join a union regarding representative participation. In Sweden unions are very powerful in supporting the rights of workers. The Swedish Teachers Union (Läraförbundet) is Sweden's largest professional trade union for every category of teacher, study and careers advisors, school heads and student teachers. Their task is to defend members rights in areas such as pay, working hours and the working environment, and to take part in negotiations with the employer. The union represents over 230,000 teachers and school heads in schools, preschools and leisure time centres. The Swedish Teachers Union works with employers, influences political decisions and conducts lobbying work. They will also survey members to use as evidence to bring about change on working conditions. Kommunal is another large union with over half a million members, representing people from the preschools. Kommunal represents several professions in municipalities and the private sector. Within preschools, important questions for members focus on (Kommunal, n.d.):

- The preschool team.
- Right to work clothes.
- Safer forms of employment
- Clarifying the occupational role of child assistants and the employer to adapt the preschool organization to better respond to the designated responsibility and task allocation. The roles in preschool must be clear as regards the special responsibility of preschool and preschool teachers.
- To work with the employer in several agreements to review opportunities for raising the occupational status of child assistants by professional development within the profession.
- Clear understanding of qualifications
- High school and adult education shall be at a national standard.

- Validation of national standards

Employees and union representatives will participate in a number of different reference groups in which other key education policy stakeholders are also represented. In this way, unions are able to monitor members' interests and allow the teaching profession to influence issues that are central to the profession and to their role as professionals.

The industrial relations are generally collaborative between the unions and employers. The consultation procedures are the same for private and public preschool organisations.

Section 4: Other issues

Media reports about Swedish preschools are not very common. However, in recent years news reporting and debates have centred on preschool funding and issues related to access and quality. Public media debates on access inequality for preschools have generally focused on the size of the child groups and waiting times for access to preschool. In some municipalities, this would suggest that due to the large numbers of children attending preschool, legal accessibility to preschool is being challenged. While municipalities are able to fulfil requirements of access by making larger group sizes of children, concern is raised about limits for group sizes of children. Public debate has also been made on the hours of participation children are entitled to. Again however, access and hours of attendance is dependent on the municipality and differs across Sweden. The organisation in the municipality in Sweden therefore emerges as an important influence on preschool staff's wellbeing.

By world standards, Sweden is able to provide high quality ECEC that is available to all children. However, national reports have highlighted a number of challenges for the municipalities that have consequences for preschool quality, especially around staff wellbeing. Preschool staff have higher rates of staff absence because of sickness. The problems are related to the overall organisation of the preschool. Summarised, the main problems around the organisation of the preschool are:

- Group sizes that are too large in order for municipalities to fulfil access requirements for children.
- Increased workloads because of greater requirements for children's learning and the documentation of learning. This leads to greater stress, leading to burn-out for teachers and assistants.
- Two thirds of the country's municipalities have no socio-economic model for resource allocation. Even if children require extra support and resources, it is the responsibility of the preschool to organise and to do so within the usual funding allocation.
- Environmental factors such as noise contribute to poor health of preschool staff. Assistants report difficulties in having breaks.
- There is a shortage of qualified teachers and assistants to work in preschools.

As Sweden works within a decentralized model of governance of preschools (municipality), it is important that consideration is given to supporting change across all of the municipalities

to improve and enhance the wellbeing of all preschool staff. By having better working conditions for preschools, quality can be maintained and enhanced.

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