

Evaluation of research on the care of  
young persons and substance abusers funded by  
The National Board of Institutional Care  
in the period 1994–2002

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SWEDISH COUNCIL FOR WORKING LIFE  
AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

## Foreword

In January 2003, government commissioned the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS), following dialogue with the National Board of Institutional Care (SiS), to evaluate research on the care of young persons and substance abusers funded by SiS in the period 1994–2002.

Professor Ragnar Hauge, Norwegian Institute for Alcohol and Drug Research (SIRUS), Oslo, Norway and Associate Professor Tine Egelund, the National Institute of Social Research, Copenhagen, Denmark were appointed as international evaluators.

FAS wishes to thank Professor Ragnar Hauge and Associate Professor Tine Egelund for their valuable work. It is our hope that the evaluation will provide a constructive basis for the continued development of SiS's research funding in the areas of youth care and the care of substance abusers, which are important both for those affected by social interventions, and for society at large.

To enable dialogue about the evaluation and its results, a seminar was arranged in February 2004 where primarily representatives of SiS and the two evaluators had an opportunity jointly to discuss the evaluation.

On behalf of FAS, Research Officer Lena Strömquist was responsible for providing administrative support to the evaluators. FAS also wishes to express its gratitude to representatives of SiS who in different ways contributed to the implementation of the evaluation.

Stockholm, 1 February 2004

*Rune Åberg*

Secretary-General, Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research

# Evaluation background

## Establishment of the National Board of Institutional Care

The National Board of Institutional Care (SiS) was established in 1993 and commenced its activities on 1 January 1994. The background was that the state in 1993 assumed responsibility for institutions for the compulsory care of alcohol and drug abusers under the Care of Abusers (Special Provisions) Act (LVM), and of young persons with social problems under the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act (LVU), respectively. From 1933 until its assumption by the state, this responsibility had rested with municipalities and county councils.

Compulsory placement of asocial children and youths and of abusers in special institutions has long traditions in Sweden – as in Finland and Norway – and became especially prevalent from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The purpose was to turn asocial children and youths into well-adjusted members of society through mandatory upbringing, while compulsory care of abusers was predicated mainly on the desire to protect society from the nuisance and disorder they created, although the belief that institutionalisation would lead to improvement was also a factor. In the post-war period there was growing scepticism concerning the use of coercion – compulsory placement of youths subsequently declined while recourse to compulsory placement was abolished with respect to abusers.

However, in the new criminal policy climate that emerged in the late 1970s, demands again emerged for more extensive use of compulsory placement, not least as a result of the growing extent of narcotics problems. In 1980 a law was promulgated which gave broader access to taking young persons into care<sup>1</sup> without the consent of the persons or their guardians. This legislation has since been replaced by a new law from 1990: the “Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act” [*Lag med särskilda bestämmelser om vård av unga*], (LVU). In addition, the new “Enforcement of Institutional Care of Young Persons Act” [*Lag om verkställighet av slutet ungdomsvård*], (LSU) was promulgated in 1998 and allows the court to sentence youths who commit serious offences to compulsory placement in preference to prison. The intention of compulsory care is to influence the young persons in a positive direction and to break their association with the milieu that led them into asocial behaviour. With respect to alcohol and drug abusers, recourse to compulsory placement was reinstated in 1982 in a new law which has since been replaced by the law promulgated in 1988: the “Care of Abusers (Special Provisions) Act” [*Lag om vård av missbrukare i vissa fall*], (LVM). The justification for reinstating recourse to compulsory placement was that such recourse was needed in order to bring abusers who were unwilling to be treated into treatment, and to keep abusers institutionalised if their commitment to treatment failed; the risk of relying exclusively on voluntary measures being that individuals with the greatest need of treatment would be left out.

Under the law of 1990 concerning compulsory placement of young persons, a decision to take youths under the age of 20 into care can be made by the County Administrative Court upon application from the Social Welfare Board if the provisions of Section 3 have been met. Section 3 provides that “the young person is exposing his health or development to a manifest risk of being damaged through abuse of habit-forming substances, criminal activity, or other socially destructive behaviour.” Under the act of 1998, youths between 15 and 17 years of age who have committed serious offences and accordingly been found guilty can also be sentenced to compulsory placement instead of prison at the court’s discretion.

Under Section 12, persons committed to care pursuant to Section 3 must normally be placed in special youth homes, generally referred to as Section 12 homes or LVU homes, for an indefinite period. However, within six months of enforcement of the decision, the Social Welfare Board must assess whether the placement should continue, in which case the decision must be re-assessed every six months. According to Section 21 the care must be discontinued at the latest when the person reaches

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<sup>1</sup> In the following we will use the concept of “vård [care]” although this is used neither in Danish or Norwegian, because concepts such as *behandling* [treatment], *omsorg* [care], *forsorg* [public assistance] etc., which it would otherwise be natural to use, are not synonymous with “vård”

age 21. The County Administrative Court can make decisions with respect to persons sentenced to youth care instead of prison, and who are deemed at the end of the placement period to be in obvious need of continued care.

The current “Care of Abusers (Special Provisions) Act” (LVM) provides that the Social Welfare Board – when receiving information internally or through other authorities of alcohol, narcotics or solvent abusers expected to be in need of care – can apply for a decision for compulsory care under section 11 of the Act at the County Administrative Court. A court decision for compulsory care must be enforced by the Social Welfare Board through placement at a home established for the purpose of providing care pursuant to the Act (LVM home) or in hospital. Under Section 20, the placement must be terminated when its purpose has been achieved, and after 6 months at the latest.

In conjunction with transferring responsibility for institutions of compulsory care to SiS, the organisation’s relationship to this legislation and how the responsibility should be divided within the organisation was discussed in a report on the new organisation’s tasks – SOU 1992:18: “Compulsory Care within the Social Services – Responsibility and Content” [*Tvångsvård i socialtjänsten – ansvar och innehåll*]. On this basis, Parliament appointed a committee which in accordance with this report established the details with respect to organising, locating and staffing of SiS as well as guidelines for SiS’s relationship to local institutions which were set down in the “Ordinance (1996:610) providing direction to the National Board of Institutional Care” [*Förordning (1996:610) med instruktion för Statens institutionsstyrelse (1996:610)*].

Under Section 2 of the ordinance, SiS has particular responsibility for:

- planning, managing, operating and supervising Section 12 homes and LVM homes,
- allocation of places in such homes,
- financial management, results monitoring and inspection,
- method development and research and development work.

### **Research under SiS**

In addition to methodological and other development work, the final point in Section 2 of the ordinance gives SiS responsibility for research into compulsory care. However, the ordinance quite naturally does not say which research areas should be taken up, nor how the research should be organised. Some directions as to content and how the research should be conducted are nevertheless found in SOU 1992:18: “Compulsory Care within the Social Services – Responsibility and Content”.

# The research field

## Research themes

It goes without saying that a research field dealing with the interaction between social outcasts, antisocial youths and abusers and an institutional system that provides compulsory care must be very broad in scope.

As mentioned, research into the effects of institutional measures receives high priority among the themes which SiS expects to support financially, both in the preparations for SiS and in a preliminary description of the research field established by SiS before the evaluation. The justification is that effects-related research constitutes a specific need in SiS's operation and a basis for developing the operation and identifying its precise goals and methods. A supplementary justification is that SiS's research is expected to interface with research conducted in universities and other research environments to the end that projects funded by SiS can be targeted to the core of the operation. It should also be pointed out that a fairly large proportion of institutional research in Sweden until now has been carried out under the direction of SiS which in this framework has actually supported research on a far broader spectrum of subjects than the effects of institutional measures. There has been a tendency for SiS also to assume funding of research initiated under other auspices (primarily universities) before the establishment of SiS. It is also noted that the institutional field – at least when SiS started operations – was neither prepared for nor adapted to effect studies because the use of well-defined treatment methods was not the dominant working model at the institutions.

The premise of this evaluation is therefore that research funded by SiS is intended to examine and analyse a field of knowledge which remains multifaceted and includes a broad range of issues. The research may deal with factors that impact on the situation, conflicts and future development of inmates<sup>2</sup>. In a general institutional analysis of Section 12 and LVM institutions, attention must also be paid to structural conditions pertaining to the institution (historical conditions, social policy, legislation, organisation of the operation, power structures, view of juvenile aberrations etc.) and the personal circumstances brought to the operation of the institutions primarily by inmates, but also by practitioners/professionals (circumstances of the inmates' upbringing, strength of their conflicts etc. and the competence, attitudes, treatment ideologies etc. of the professionals). The research also touches upon organisational practices relating to compulsory treatment in institutions; the interplay between inmates and organisational practices and the results/effects of such interplay in daily life at the institution and in the later life of inmates.

It is of course hardly feasible to integrate all perspectives on the conditions and practical operation of institutions into a single investigation. There is a clear need for investigations that attempt to provide an institutional overview of the operation of institutions and a few such examples are indeed found in the evaluation material. It is nevertheless a fact that the knowledge interest is more specific and the choice of perspectives correspondingly narrower in many relevant investigations. However, with respect to a research field such as the operation of institutions, it should be possible to demand of individual investigations that the researchers reflect on their chosen perspective and its explanatory possibilities and limitations in an institutional context.

It is also evident that a research field of such scope demands scientific collaboration of an interdisciplinary nature. Research contributions from a single discipline which are not inspired by theories outside that discipline are for the most part unlikely to capture the complexity which characterises institution-related issues.

The following should not be seen as an exhaustive definition of the field that could be covered by research funded by SiS. It is intended rather to provide the evaluation with a working basis for assessing the extent to which relevant sub-areas that relate to understanding the operation and results

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<sup>2</sup> Here and in the following we will use the word "indsat" or "intatt" [inmate] to identify those who are subject to a compulsory placement decision under the provisions of LVU and LVM.

of institutions have been examined in research published to date under the auspices of SiS. On this premise, the research field could include:

1. **The institution as organisation.** For instance research into the historical roots and development of the institution, its fundamental concepts, tasks, mode of operation, conflicts and results.
2. **The organisational practices of institutional life and their consequences.** Examples include daily routines and rituals and how they are influenced by the inmates; the organisational creation of institutional identities etc.
3. **Power perspectives at the institutions.** What do the “big” and “little” power practices look like in daily life at an institution? What does coercion signify for the inmates and what types of counterforce do they encounter? How does social isolation affect the course of the inmates’ development? Etc.
4. **The treatment concept and the design of the actual treatment.** What does institutional treatment entail? What is the daily content and method of the treatment? What impact does coercion have on the treatment? What conflicts exist between coercion and treatment? How are treatment principles and techniques justified? What well-defined treatment models are actually used?
5. **School attendance, learning, education and motivation at the institutions.** This special element of the institutional treatment effort has been specifically included. While schooling is a problematic area for many youth home inmates, education is of strategic importance for the future prospects of young persons. It is therefore important to examine what the schooling actually consists of and what results can be achieved by the education provided in youth homes. At LVM institutions, motivational efforts aimed at inducing the inmate to opt for voluntary treatment is the central issue and raises attendant questions.
6. **Effect studies.** This refers to research concerning the results of well defined and well implemented treatment models, including client effects, effects on the personnel, and financial effects.
7. **Professional perspectives at the institutions.** This could include a varied assortment of issues such as the staff members’ knowledge level, treatment ideologies, views on the situation of inmates, methodological preferences etc. Research into working conditions, work environment and conflicts at work also falls under this heading. Studies concerning the coordination of measures of significance to inmates across institutional and professional borders may also be relevant.
8. **What characterises the target group as a whole?** This refers to detailed mapping of risk and protection factors (personal, family-related, relational outside the family, and social environment factors) in the inmates’ upbringing and analysis of how these factors interact in different development scenarios for the inmates.
9. **What characterises specific groups of inmates?** As in point 8, but with a focus e.g. on gender and ethnicity perspectives relating to the target group.
10. **To what extent can institutional placement compensate for the situation that caused the placement?** This point aims at a view of “effects” that goes beyond the influence exerted by concrete treatment models on various concrete effect measurements and touches on the psychosocial situation in which former inmates find themselves later in life.
11. **How do inmates perceive their situation, the outside world and their relation to the treatment system?** This refers to the inmates’ personal reflections on their upbringing, opportunities in life and interventions by society. This could also include studies on how they actually handle living in an institution.

### **Description of research materials used in the evaluation**

In the area of youth care the evaluation comprises 30 projects whereof 17 have been reported. For seven projects the project period has expired without a report having been presented. The project period is still ongoing for a further six projects and no reports can be expected as yet. In the area of abuse the evaluation comprises 26 projects, whereof 17 have been reported. For five projects the project period has expired without a final report having been presented. For one of these, the grant has been returned to SiS. The project period is still ongoing for a further four projects.

Tables 4a and 4b below provide an overview of how projects are linked to scientific disciplines, the size of research grants, and the number of publications.

Linking a project to a discipline does not necessarily mean that the research draws theoretical inspiration only from that discipline. Some researchers who have produced materials have been inspired by theoretical perspectives from within their own discipline as well as related disciplines.

## Summary

In the foregoing we have attempted to account for our assessment of research funded by SiS, i.e. research conducted by external researchers funded by research grants from SiS. However, as discussed in point 1.3, this only includes part of the research carried out under the auspices of SiS. Certain development projects funded by SiS furthermore come close to research activities, while researchers employed by SiS also are engaged in some research which has not been referenced.

Our evaluation has been based on the premise of our mandate which, as mentioned, states:

“Funded research is to be analysed in terms of focus, scientific quality and practical relevance and in these respects be compared with other Swedish and international research during the period in question. Where applicable, research funded by SiS should also be evaluated in terms of the feedback reporting requirements (equality, ethics, young researchers, interdisciplinary approaches etc.) that apply to research funding distributed by national funding agencies.”

The mandate entails a limitation to evaluate the design and content of the research on the basis of scientific criteria and utility criteria. However, the significance of the research is also evaluated by other criteria. Recruitment of researchers in general is a criterion – and in section 1.4 we noted that a number of projects funded by SiS have resulted in doctoral and licentiate degrees. Another criterion could be the recruitment of researchers to specific fields of research – in this case research concerning institutions of compulsory care. In both these areas, research funding from SiS appears to have been important.

Concerning the question raised by our mandate with respect to research design, we reported in section 4.2 that certain research themes in our opinion have received scant attention. This applies firstly to SiS institutions as organisations where the tasks and functions of the institutions are submitted to empiric examination. Secondly, we have found no empiric descriptions of target groups and their sub-groups. Thirdly, we see a need for studies into the effects of interventions on the target groups. And fourthly, we find a lack of a user perspective in the analyses of institutional treatment of young persons, whereas the user perspective has received stronger emphasis in research concerning abusers.

There can obviously be several explanations why these issues have not been raised. However, we have no reason to believe that it is the result of selectivity on the part of SiS when it comes to providing research grants for such projects, nor is it surprising that certain issues are poorly represented. SiS' research grants are after all limited, and it is therefore not possible to cover all areas equally well. We could also have based our report on the opposite premise and highlighted areas that are well represented.

Evaluation of the scientific quality of the research must be based on the publications emerging from research projects funded by SiS. In section 4 of this document we report on our review of these publications. As shown in section 4.1 it appears that about one-third of the publications consist of more popular reports and articles aimed at practitioners. The remaining two-thirds can be defined as research publications. The publications vary widely in terms of quality. Although many are of excellent quality, there are also some that do not rate very highly in this respect. This raises questions on how to perform quality assurance of research products – either centrally by SiS or internally within research environments that receive funding – an issue which, however, falls outside our mandate.

The vast majority of publications are in Swedish, with only a limited number being published in English. Notwithstanding the importance of dialogue with other researchers in Scandinavia, and particularly within Sweden, the result of the small proportion of English publications is to severely curtail dissemination of research results to international colleagues. There is also reason to believe that publication in English in international journals is a more effective way to reach Scandinavian research environments than publication in Scandinavian languages, and should therefore be encouraged.

Review of the publications does not provide much information on the practical relevance of the research since this would require collection of data from persons working within institutions; a task

which is beyond what we have been able to accomplish. We would therefore direct the reader to the evaluation undertaken by parliamentary auditors, to which reference is made in section 5.5.

Our mandate requires research sponsored by SiS in these areas to be compared with other Swedish and international research during the period under review. For obvious reasons it has not been possible for us to undertake a systematic examination of this research, and our evaluation must of necessity be based on knowledge gained in our professional lives as researchers.

In relation to other Swedish research in this area, our impression is that researchers supported by SiS to some extent are the same who receive grants from other research appropriations. Grants from SiS have become a supplement to research funding from other sources for those working in the field of youth and abuser research, rather than having the effect of attracting new groups of researchers to this field. Since the researchers, research groups and institutions that receive financial support from SiS are to some extent the same that otherwise operate in this field, it is difficult to identify differences between research funded by SiS and research funded by other sources. It is another matter that funding from SiS undoubtedly has resulted in more emphasis being given to issues related to compulsory care, than would have been the case without this funding.

With respect to the comparison with international research, it is a characteristic feature in the youth area that international research often focuses on the effects of specific treatment methods in the context of institutional care. This also means that much research in this field makes extensive use of statistical methods. It is also difficult to make international comparisons of research concerning compulsory treatment of young persons since there can be major differences in the institutions where young persons are placed. As an example, young persons in conflict with their environment in Anglo-Saxon countries are now and then sent to juvenile prisons where the level of restrictions exceeds anything known in Swedish compulsory care institutions at the same time as the intervention ideology is different and often unequivocally emphasises the element of punishment.

In the same way, international comparison is difficult with respect to abuser research because compulsory placement of abusers as a result of their abuse is rarely used in other countries, and there is consequently little research in this field. However, comparisons with research relating to other types of placement of abusers – either in voluntary care or in prison due to criminal activity – does point out a peculiar aspect of Swedish research which makes little use of the quantitative methods that tend to dominate research in other countries. Based on the research it is therefore difficult to form an impression of the extent of compulsory placement, the people who are forcibly committed, and how their subsequent lives unfold. By contrast we learn much about the fates of individuals as well as daily life in and outside the institution. Perhaps it could be said that while Swedish research is more interested in abusers as individuals and in their personal situations, international research shows more interest in abusers as statistical categories. As such, this thematic and methodological difference nevertheless does not mean that one type of research is more or less valuable than the other, and research funded by SiS is consistently on a par with corresponding qualitative studies from other countries.

Our evaluation mandate also calls for the research to be assessed from the standpoint of the feedback reporting requirements with respect to equality, ethics, young researchers, interdisciplinary aspects etc. that apply to research funding distributed by national research councils. This we have attempted to do in section 5.4. It appears that while male and older researchers are in the majority, this cannot be construed as a form of discrimination. With respect to interdisciplinary investigations, these are relatively few according to SiS's own assessment.

Section 2 provides a detailed look at procedural aspects in the distribution of research funding. On this premise we have raised the question as to whether qualification rules are adequate. Since the members of the research council are often researchers who receive or who represent research environments that receive funding from SiS, we see a need for discussion on how scientific council members should be selected and whether more detailed rules should be established to deal with qualification issues in order to avoid the qualification of members being questioned.