



Swedish National Institute  
of **Public Health**

Men, masculinities, fatherhood  
and care-giving  
A Swedish perspective



Global symposium: Engaging boys and men in achieving  
gender equity, Rio De Janero, April 2 2009

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- The traditional steps towards a more gender equal society often focus on improved basic female rights regarding reproduction, education, paid work, and safety, which are all essential determinants of health and longevity.

However,

- In order to reach overall gender equality, as it is stated in for example Swedish gender policy, strategies must also be directed to men;
  - an overarching concern in the Scandinavian countries has for several decades been reaching out to men to make them more involved in the caring of children.



# The Swedish family generalized policies – engaging men in parenthood



# Milestones regarding increased gender equality in Sweden

- 1845: Similar rights of inheritance between women and men
- 1864: Husbands lose legal right to punish their wives
- 1870: Women allowed to higher certificate and university studies
- 1874: Married women may decide upon own income
- 1919: Women allowed to vote for parliament and to be voted
- 1939: Prohibition to dismiss women who get married
- 1940: Prohibition to dismiss women due to pregnancy
- 1960: Right to equal salary for equal work between women and men
- 1974: Parental insurance reform permitting fathers to paternity leave
- 1975: Exclusive right to decide on abortion for women
- 1980: Law against discrimination by sex in working life
- 1983: Women allowed to all occupations, including armed forces
- 1988: Law against violating "women's serenity"



# The Swedish "paternity leave" reform of 1974

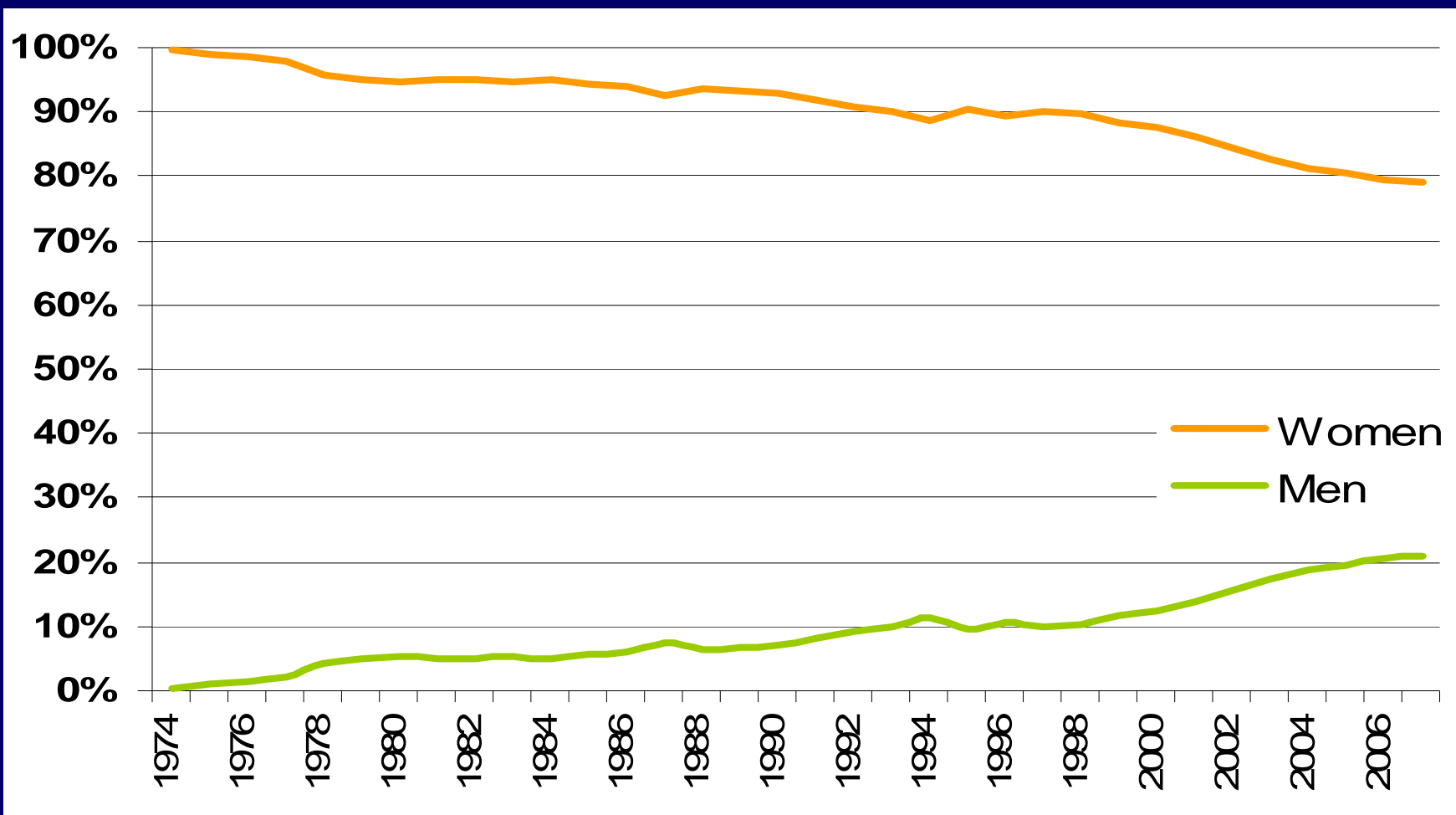
- During the 1970s, FAMILY was an important target arena of Swedish gender equality strategies, thus several family - based reforms were implemented.

## Some strategies

- 1) Tax reform that strengthened the dual-earner norm by separate taxation for married people,
- 2) An extended and publicly funded child-care system for all,
- 4) Paid parental leave (12 months) + 6 months
- 3) Implementation of the parental insurance system that also permitted fathers to take paid parental leave.



# The share of parental leave in Sweden 1974–2007



Ref. Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2008

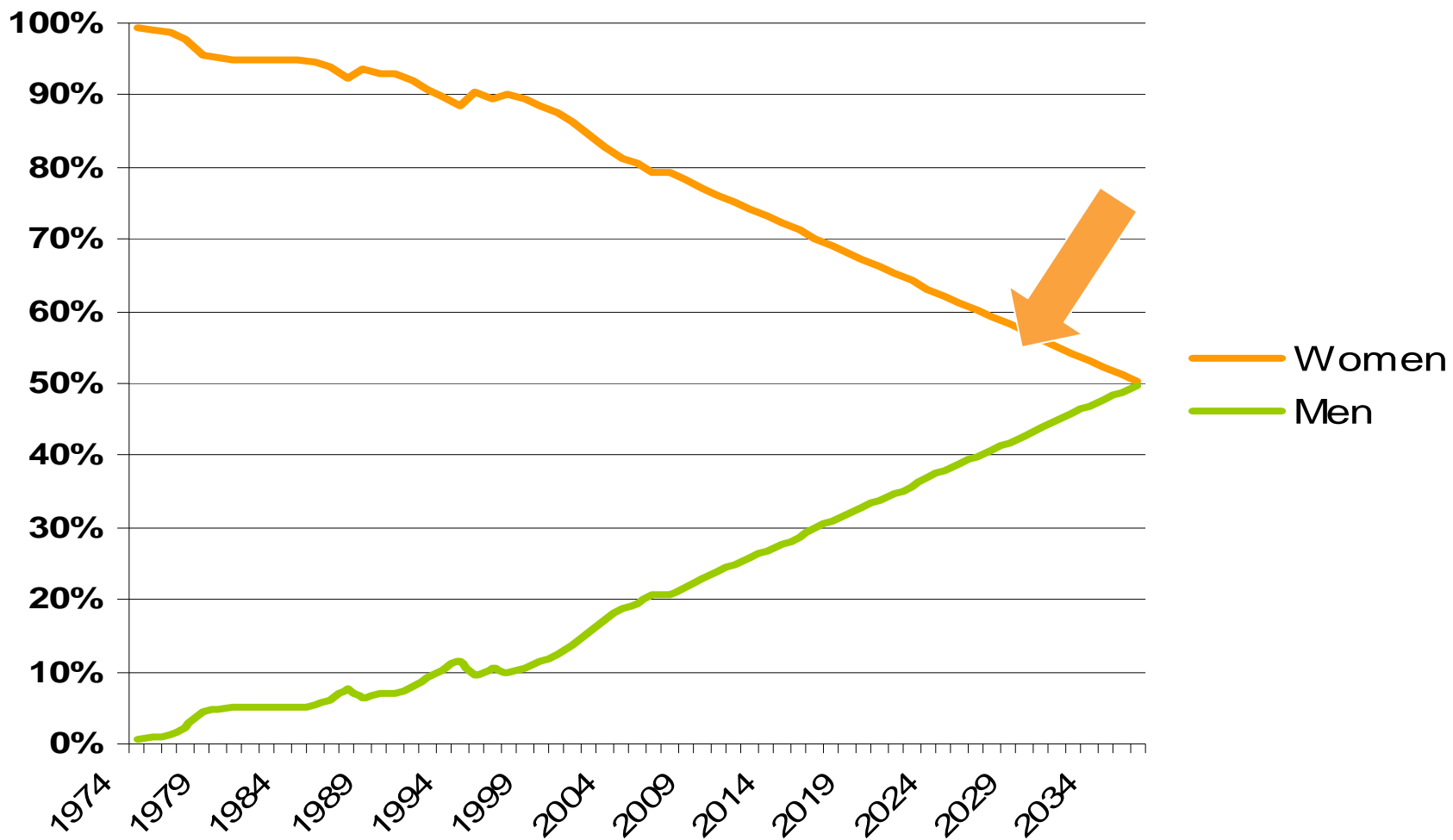


# Engaging men in parenthood

- The main aim of the paternity leave reform (1974), was to encourage men to take on care responsibility and simultaneously increase the number of women into paid work.
- A more equal division of parental leave in the beginning of parenthood was seen as a prerequisite for a more equal division of the parents' future duties in the domestic and working life.
- Since then, men's proportion for the utilization of parental leave has steadily increased, from 0,5% (1974), to 20,8% (2007)



# How do we get here?



Is there any scientific evidence on public health benefits for fathers themselves, their children and society at large?



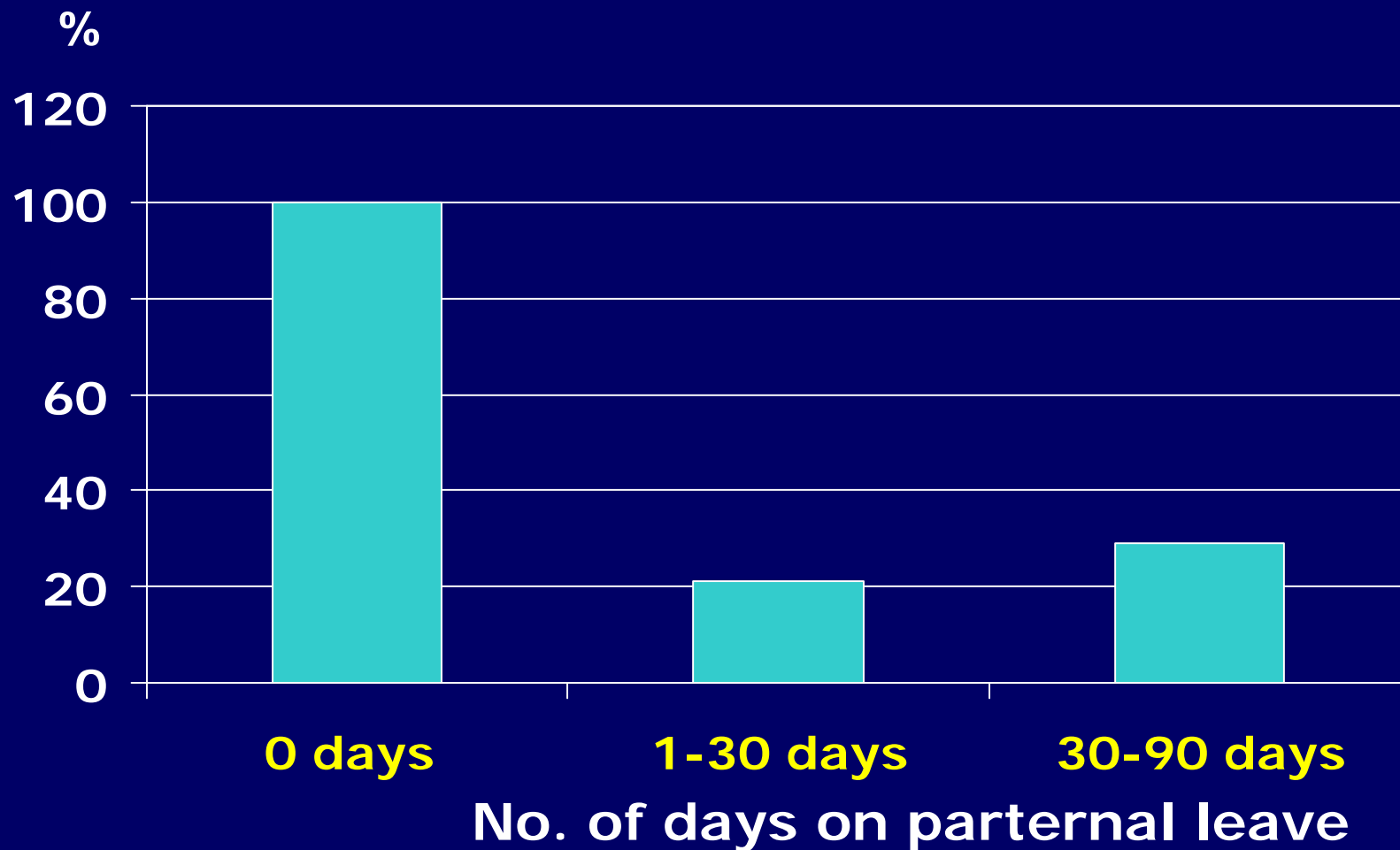
# Scientific evidence of public health benefits from engaging men in parenthood

- Men who took paternity leave had 14.1 fewer sick days off work than men who did not
- Men who took 30-60 days paternity leave had a 25 % decrease in premature mortality risk compared to men who did not

(Ref. *Månsdotter, et al, Healthy Policy 2007*)



# Risk for alcohol-related care and/or disability by length of partenal leave



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Ref. Månsdotter, et al BMC Public Health 2008, 81

# Good father = good children?

Sarkadi et al. Acta Paediatrica. 2005: 97(2)

An active father figure:

- Reduces problem behaviour in boys and psychological problems in girls
- Reduces criminality in low-income families
- Increases cognitive abilities in children
- Contributes to lower rates of substance use among children



## Responsive parenting: interventions and outcomes

Neir Eshel,<sup>a</sup> Bernadette Daelmans,<sup>b</sup> Meena Cabral de Mello,<sup>b</sup> & Jose Martines<sup>b</sup>

**Abstract** In addition to food, sanitation and access to health facilities children require adequate care at home for survival and optimal development. Responsiveness, a mother's/caregiver's prompt, contingent and appropriate interaction with the child, is a vital parenting tool with wide-ranging benefits for the child, from better cognitive and psychosocial development to protection from disease and mortality. We examined two facets of responsive parenting — its role in child health and development and the effectiveness of interventions to enhance it — by conducting a systematic review of literature from both developed and developing countries. Our results revealed that interventions are effective in enhancing maternal responsiveness, resulting in better child health and development, especially for the neediest populations. Since these interventions were feasible even in poor settings, they have great potential in helping us achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We suggest that responsiveness interventions be integrated into child survival strategies.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization 2006;84:992-999.

*Voir page 997 le résumé en français. En la página 998 figura un resumen en español.*

نظرة على الملخص بالعربية في صفحة 998.

### Introduction

With only a decade left to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, the status of the world's children remains grim. Every year, 10.6 million children

child behaviour the caregiver — most often the mother — is responding to: a sign of illness, a verbal overture, a facial expression or an exploratory initiative. In each case, however, the mother's ac-

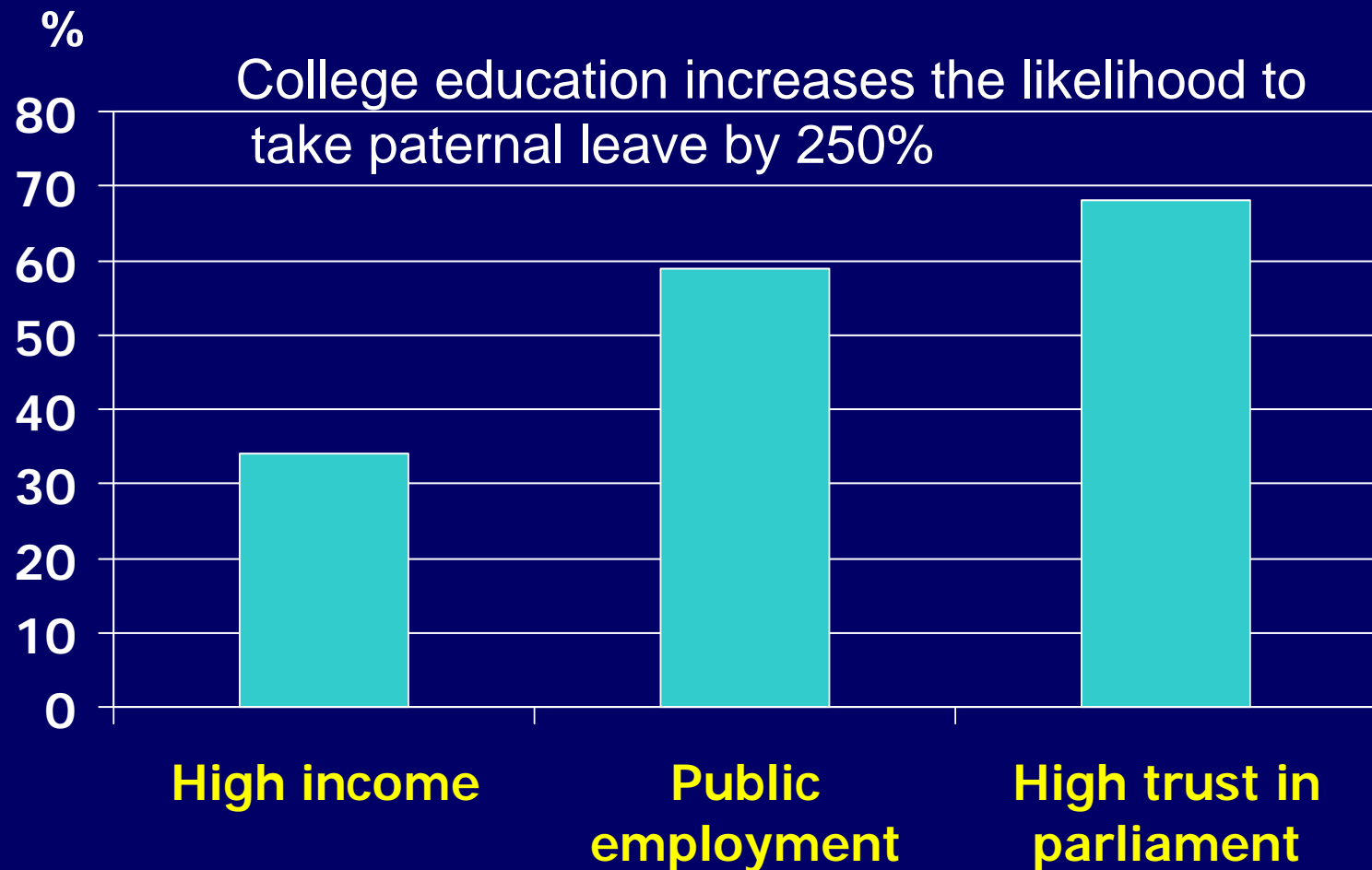
and social wellbeing of children, as well as the efficacy of interventions directed at enhancing maternal responsiveness

### Methods



What factors contribute to men's  
engagement in parenthood?

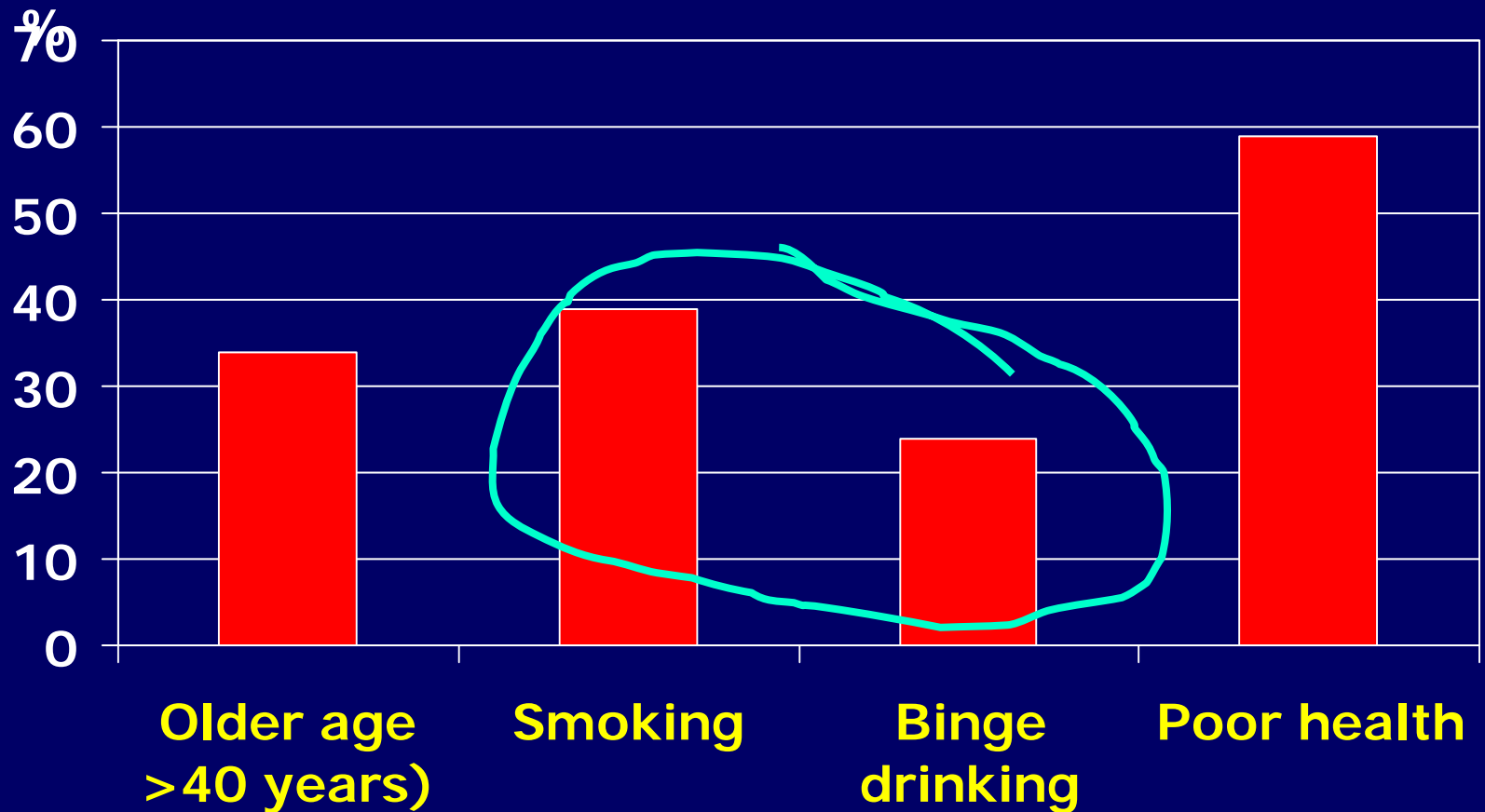
# Characteristics that increase the likelihood to take paternal leave >60 days/child of parental leave in Sweden



*Ref. Månsdotter, et al Healthy Policy 2009*



# Characteristics that reduce the likelihood to take paternal leave >60 days/child of parental leave in Sweden



*Ref. Månsdotter, et al Healthy Policy 2009*



Why do we need evidence on public health benefits of engaging men in parenthood?



1. To contribute to the achievement Millenium Development Goals:
  - Children need adequate care beyond provision of basic needs for better cognitive and psychosocial development
2. To address the recommendations of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health:
  - Improve Daily Living Conditions: Improve the circumstances in which children are born and grow
3. To implement the Swedish National Public Health Policy the
  - Priority: National strategy to support parents and strengthen parenting skills



# The renewed Swedish National Public Health Policy 2003

- The Government Bill 2007/08:110 on a renewed public health policy aims at increased public health work based both on people's need for integrity and freedom of choice and on the relationship between the conditions for health and individual prerequisites.
- The health-promoting element of preventive public health work is emphasized, particularly for Children, Adolescents and Elderly
- The Swedish Government has set aside approx EUR 12.2 million/ year since 2008 to e.g., support parents and strengthen parenting skills
- Additionally, Conditions during childhood and adolescence is the third of the 11 Swedish Public health objectives



# Still work to be done...

In Sweden a larger number of women than men reduce working hours after childbirth, and long periods of leave (or reduced working hours), thus less likely to enhance women's career progression...

- In Sweden as many women as men work outside home, yet among the top 20% of men and women earners, the gender wage gap is 19% in Sweden compared to the OECD average of 16%" (Ref. OECD rapport, "Babies and bosses – reconciling work and family life (Vol 4))



# The way forward?

- Can we afford to wait for another 35 years to engage men?
- Is there a need for more progressive legislation and policies?
- Should parental leave allowance be split equally - 50% to mothers and father respectively?
- Should "Gender equity rewards/penalties" to families be implemented more aggressively?



Extensive scientific evidence on public health benefits of engaging men is needed.

Such evidence should directly feed into policy options that can enhance men's engagement in strategies for increased gender equity



Gender equity is a  
substantial  
determinant of health

Thus involving men in  
gender equity policies  
is a public health  
issue

