



# **Fifty moves a year**

**Joint physical custody in Sweden**  
**Malin Bergström**



## Aims the Elvis-project

1. To study wellbeing, health and social situation in preschoolers, schoolaged children and adolescents in shared parenting
  2. To describe experiences of parent's of children 0-4 yrs in shared parenting
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# The Elvis-project

- Since 2011 studies on school children
- Since 2015 we focus on preschoolers



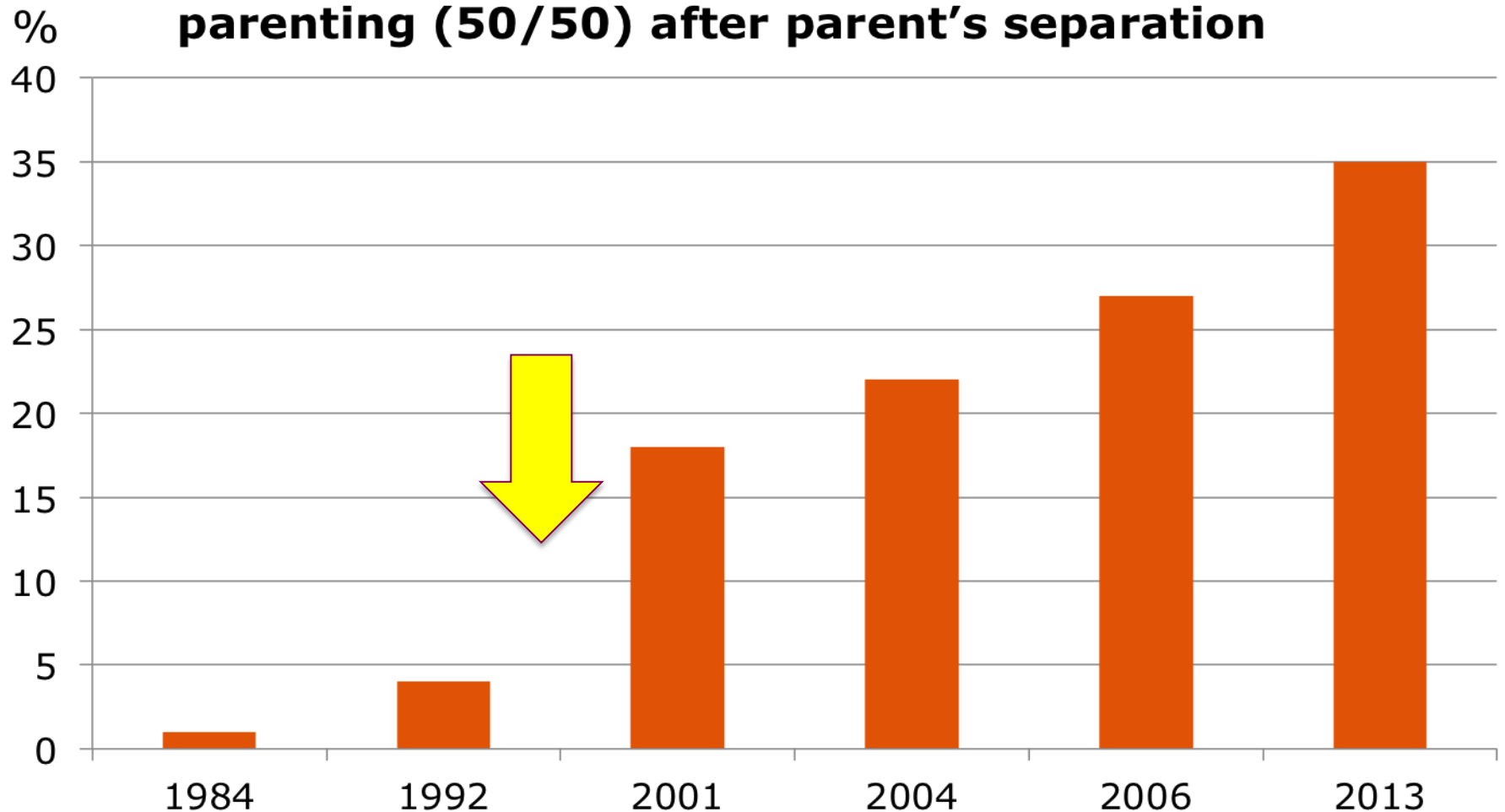
## Our definition

Shared parenting/joint physical custody refers to children living alternatively and **equally much** with both parents after a parental separation or divorce

In Swedish studies shared parenting is defined as  
50/50 shares

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## Proportion of Swedish children in shared parenting (50/50) after parent's separation



# Parental leave

- Gender neutral since 1974
- Legal right to stay home until child age 18 months
- 16 months paid parental leave
- 8 for one parent, 8 for the other
- 3 months exclusive for each parent
- Legal right to work part-time until child age 8 years
- Sick leave until child age 12 yrs







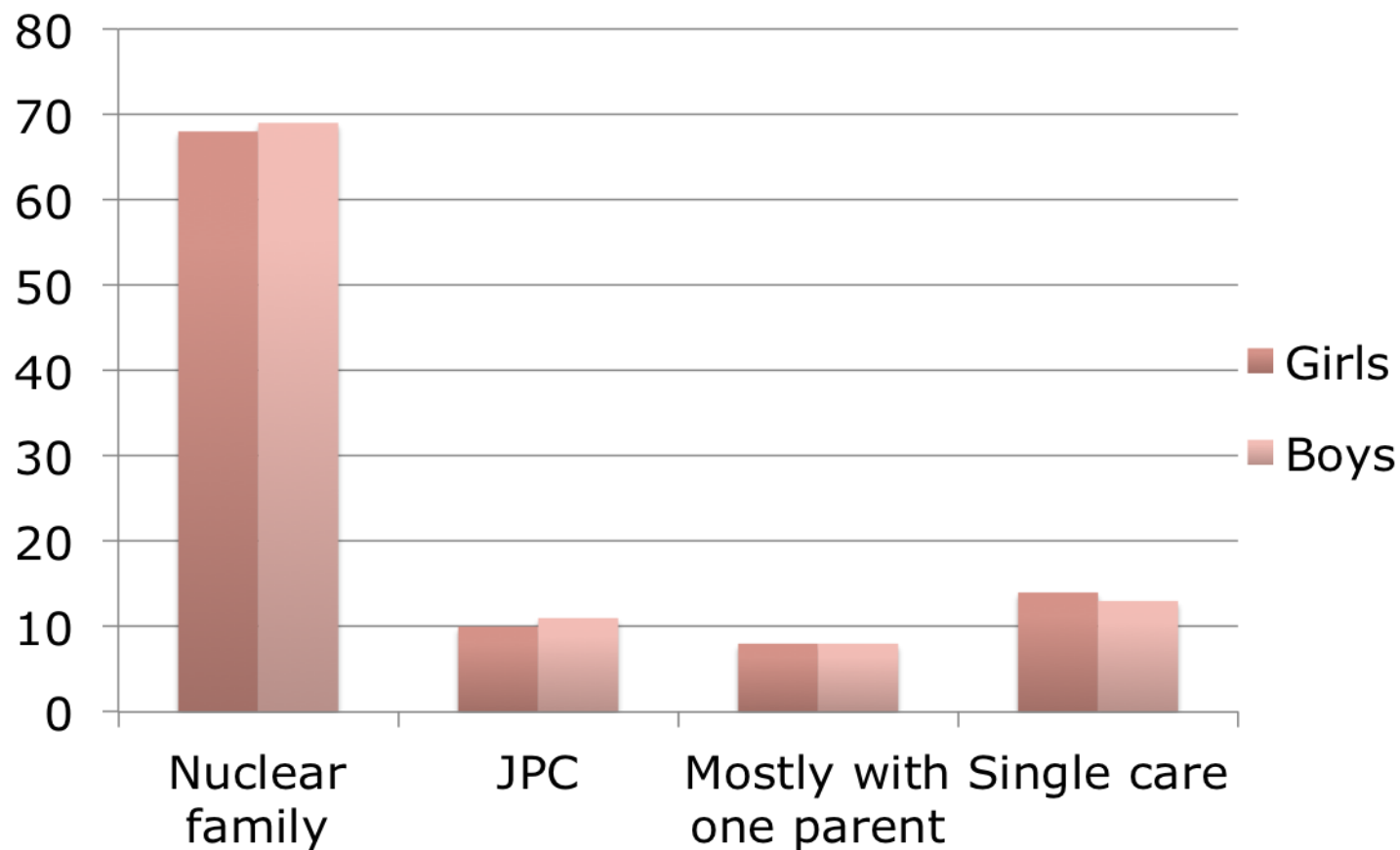
# Preschool



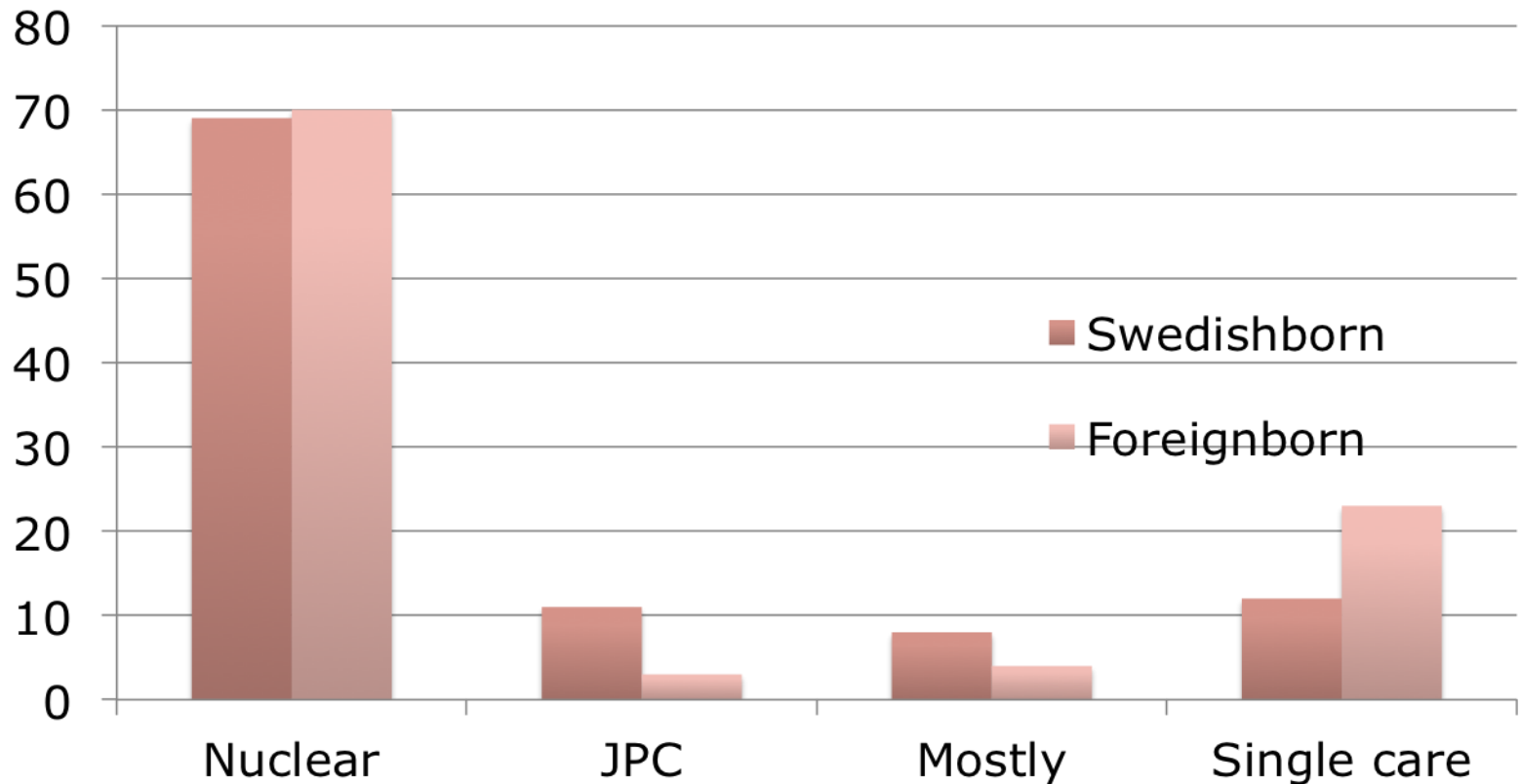




# Few gender differences



## Swedishborn four times more shared parenting Foreignborn twice as often maternal single care



## More moving kids in the future?

More common among younger children and recently separated parents



## Concerns about JPC

- Stress because of the constant moves?
- Difficulties seeing friends, problems with keeping close relationships?
- Increased exposure for parental conflict?
- Spoiled children?

### **For infants and preschoolers:**

- Disturbed attachment relations?

## Assumed benefits of JPC

- Facilitates good relations with both parents
    - No loss of attachment figures
  - The child keeps both parent's material, social and relational resources
  - Love and boundaries
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# Swedish research on shared parenting

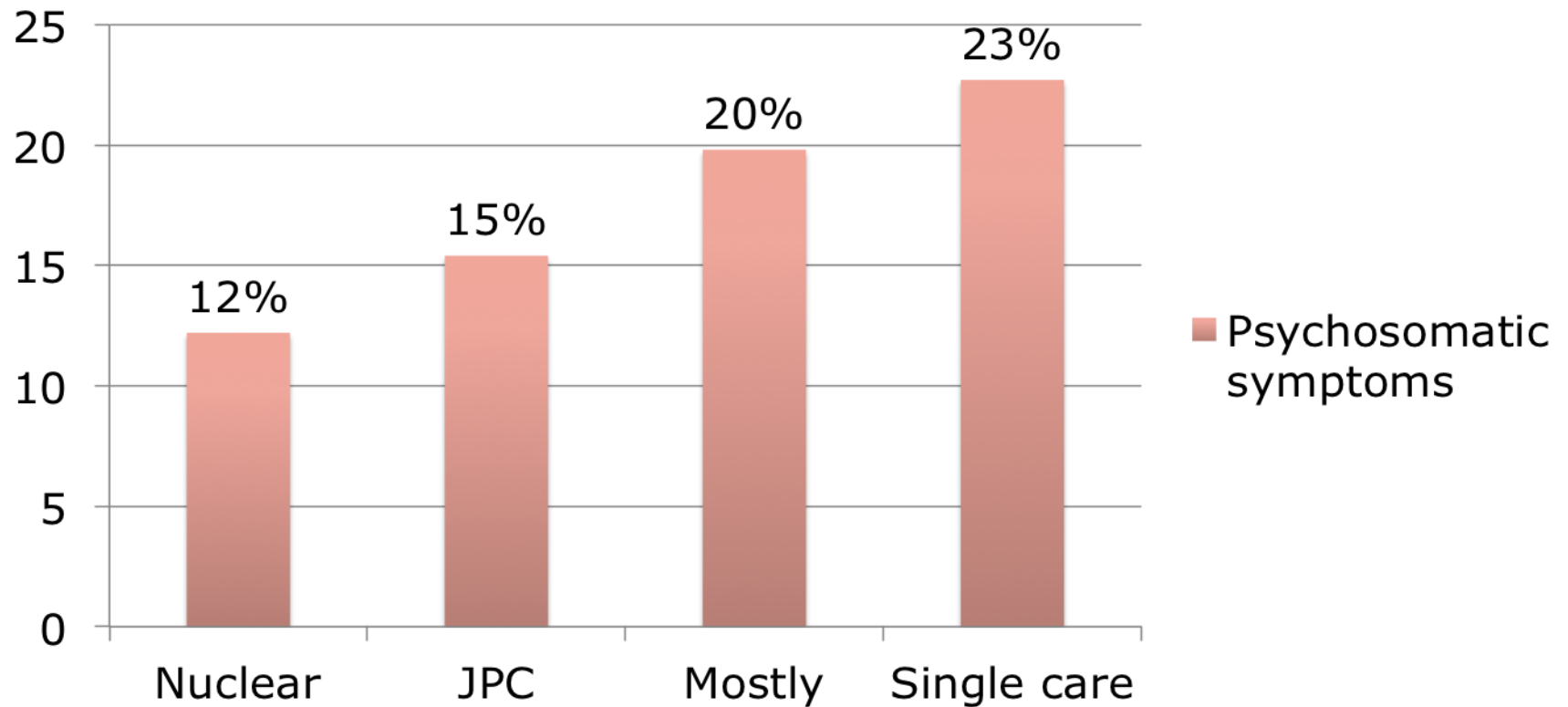


- Eleven Swedish studies on schoolaged children
- One submitted paper on children's living conditions
- Two submitted papers on preschoolers

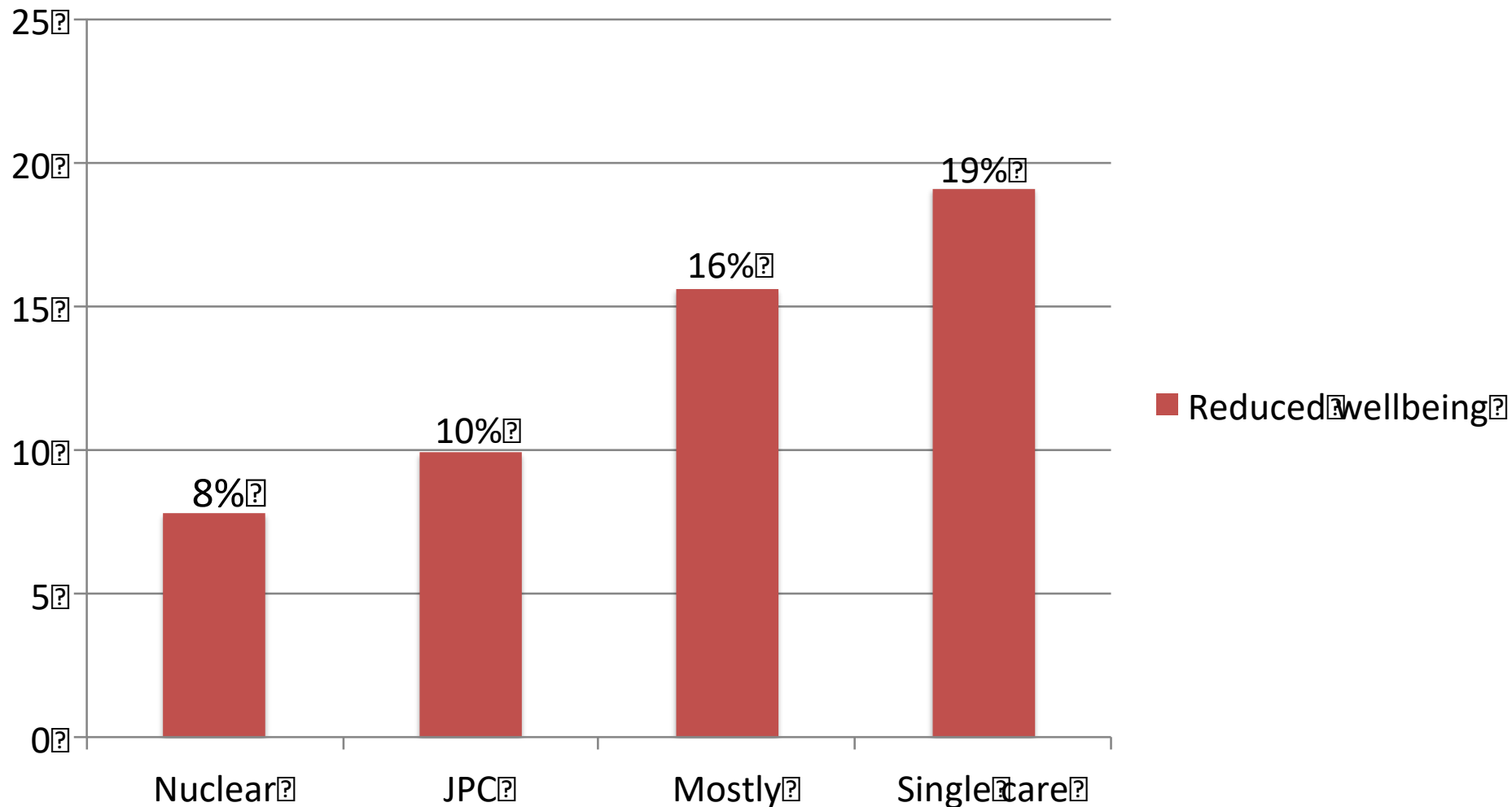
# Schoolaged children and adolescents



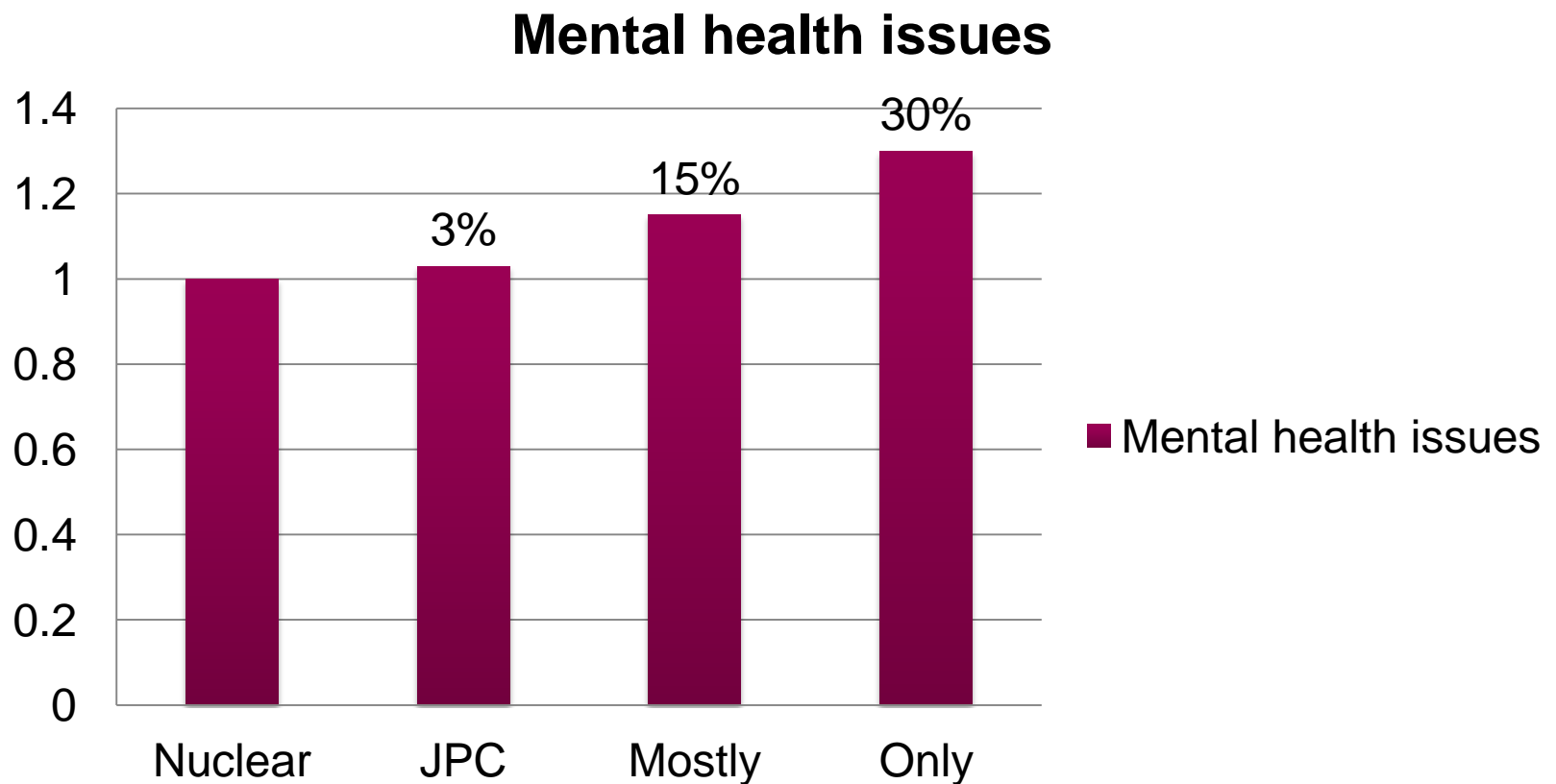
## Psychosomatic symptoms



# Low health related quality of life physical, psychological and social wellbeing



# Risk increase in children with divorced parents compared to nuclear families

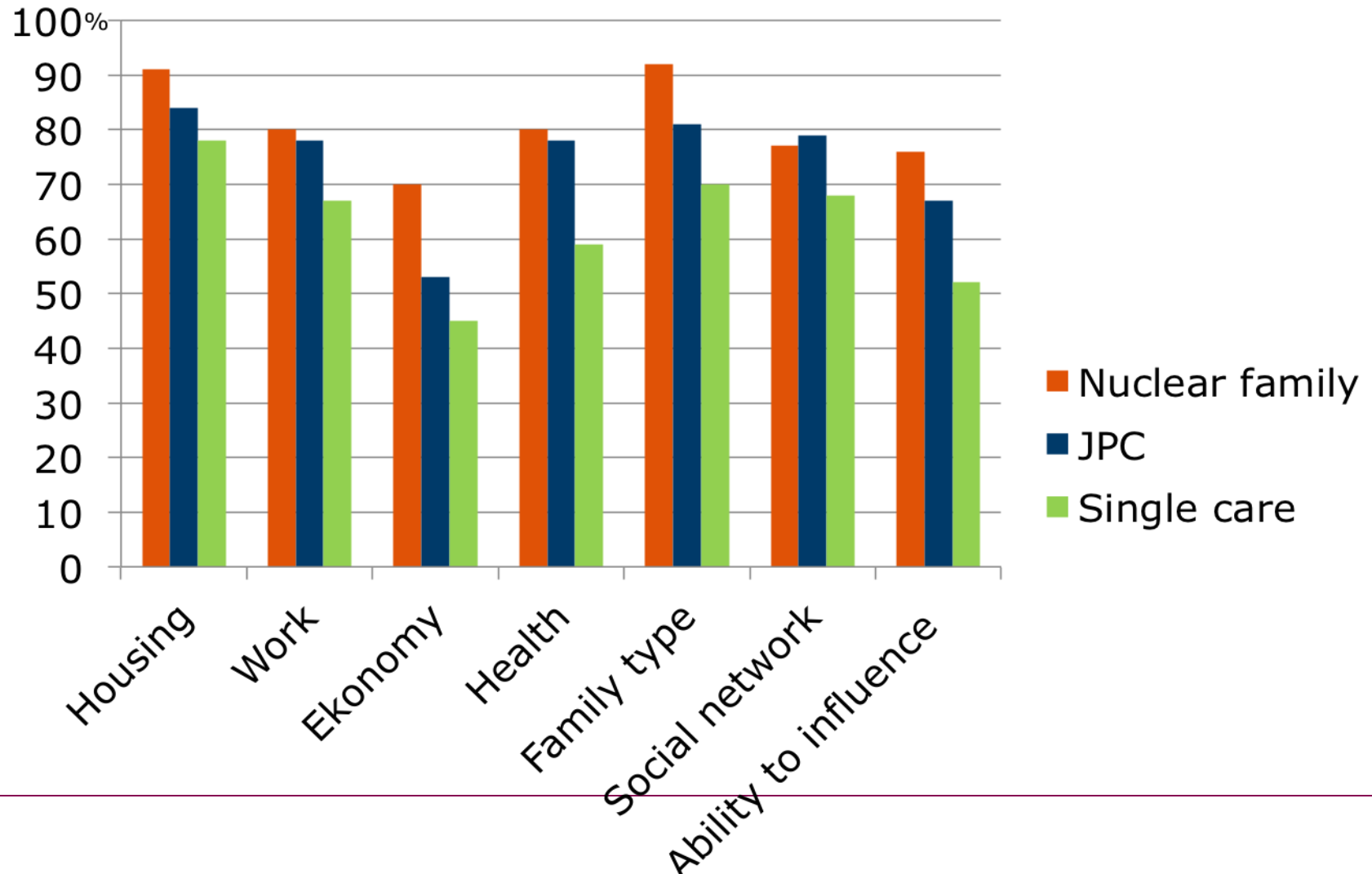


Children in shared parenting arrangements rate their relationship to parents as about the same as those in nuclear families. The relationships to their fathers are particularly good.





# Satisfaction in Swedish parents with children 0-18 år, N=1444



# Shared parenting for preschoolers



# Why is shared parenting so controversial for preschoolers?

- Their need for a secure base, predictability and continuity
  - Primary attachment figure
  - Separations
  - Exposure to parental conflict
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# Attachment relations- emotional bonds

All emotional bonds:

1. Last over time
2. Direct to a specific individual that is non transferable
3. Have emotional relevance
4. Are signified by a wish for proximity
5. Unease in case of involuntary separation...

...but attachment relations are different

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1. Last over time
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5. Unease in case of involuntary separation

Typical for the attachment relations:

6. Seeking for security, comfort and protection.



## Interviews with parents



- Children 0-4 yrs in JPC
  - Telephone interviews
  - 46 parents to 50 children
  - Mean child age at separation 21 months
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# Swedish separations with infants and toddlers



- Often shared parenting
  - Often a mutual agreement between parents
  - Worries about the children: how are they affected?
  - Are defiance, emotional symptoms or feeding/sleeping problems a reaction to the divorce and living arrangement?
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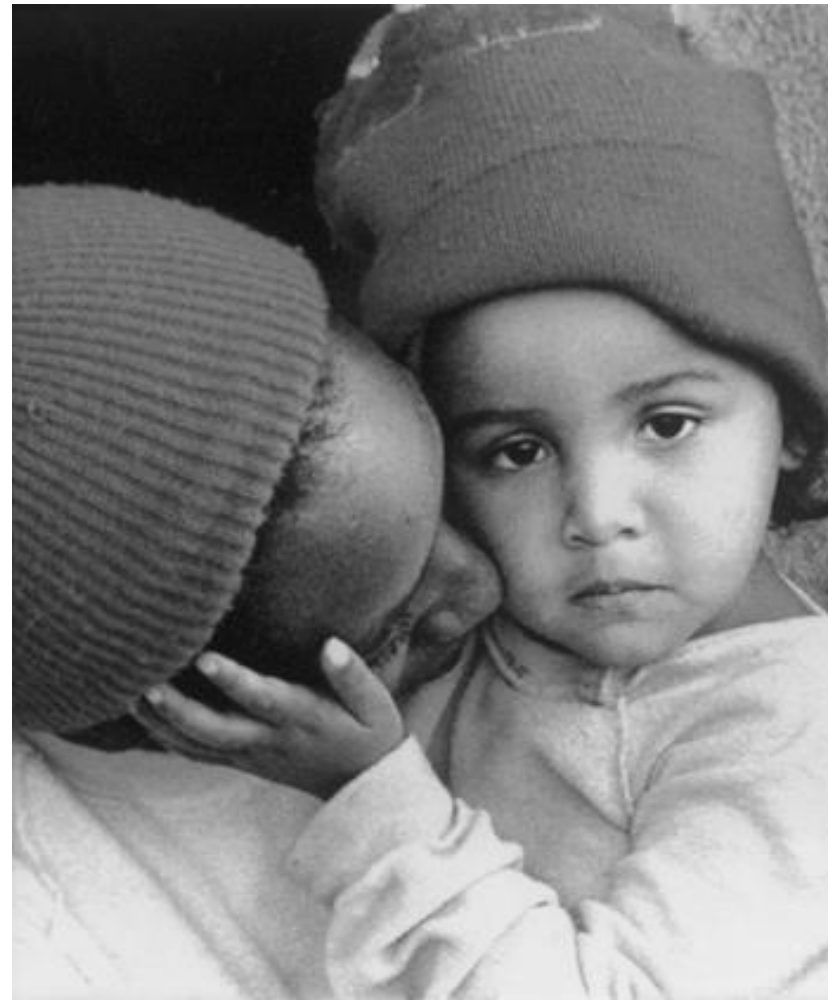
- The majority considered JPC as a given
  - They stressed the child's right to both it's parents
    - And the importance of an equal parenthood
  - Fathers must often struggle more to get equal JPC
  - Some parents descibed problems in their relation
    - Unbalanced parental roles before the separation
    - Dramatic circumstances such as domestic violence or adultery during pregnancy
    - JPC as a result of a court decision
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*"It was really a given. Why should they live more with one of us when they are children to us both?"* Mother of 3 year old girl



*"Dads nowadays are not like dads used to be. Now dads are as much parents as mums. I would find it extremely weird if I got to know someone who did not shared parenting equally."*

Mother of a girl of 13 months



*“It was ideology from the start, that both parents should be equally important”*

Father of 18 months old girl



*"When we were about to separate and decided on JPC we didn't get any reactions. Our friends and families supported us and everyone agreed that this was the only possible alternative"*

Father of 2 year old boy





# Attachment

*"When we changed preschool there was this teacher whom he was particularly attached to. He became hysterical if she left. It might be that he has a problem with the thought that people may disappear and not always be there. Since he is in shared parenting, I mean."*

Mother of 3 year old boy



**"My greatest worry is how we can make shared parenting work"**

The parents evaluated their children's behaviour

"Is it normal to.....?"

Adjustments were made

- An afternoon extra with the child in the other parent's week
- Frequent moves to make to child long less for the other parent
- Longer periods to lessen the amount of separations

# Studies on behaviour and mental health in Swedish 3-5 year olds



## Two manuscripts and one ongoing cohort on preschoolers

- 2 775 Nordic children 2-7 years of age; 99 in JPC 187 in single care
  - 3656 Swedish 3-5 year olds; 136 in JPC, 79 living mostly with one parent and 72 in single care.
  - Outcome measure: the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) completed by parents and in the second study also by preschool teachers.
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## **The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire**

- Measures child behaviour and mental health with 25 questions
  - Subscales: internalized problems, externalized problems, peer relations, conduct, hyperactivity and social behaviour
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## Mean values for SDQ in Nordic 2-7 year olds

	Nuclear family	JPC	Single care
Total score	6.73	7.35	8.63
Hyperactivity	2.83	2.90	3.50
Emotional	1.29	1.60	1.83
Conduct	1.47	1.47	1.77
Peer relations	1.15	1.53	1.55

# Mean values for SDQ in Swedish 3-5 year olds

	Parents	Teachers
Nuclear family	5.89	3.55
JPC	5.98	4.32
Mostly with one	7.97	5.82
Single care	7.86	5.76

## Conclusion

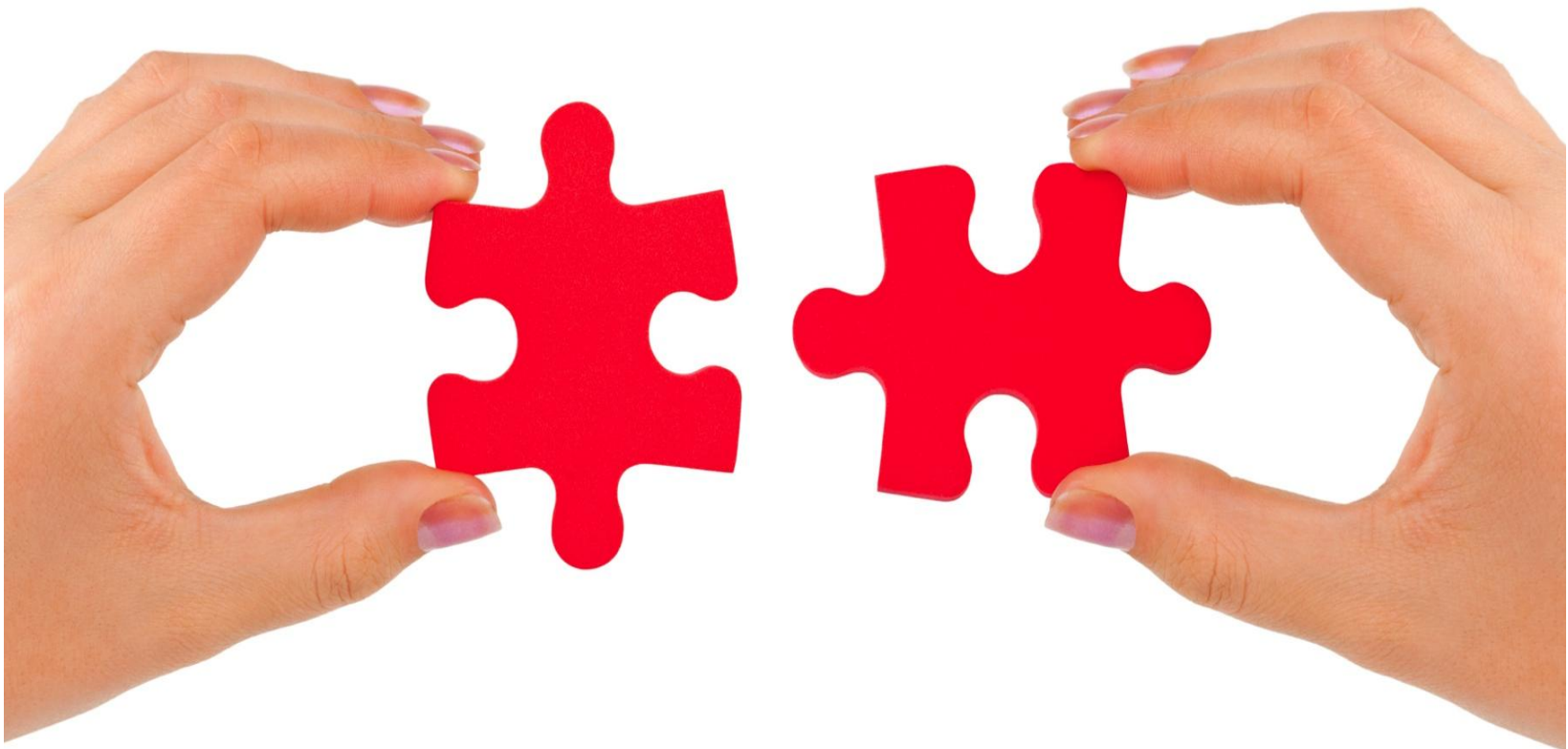
- 2-7 year olds in JPC suffered from less psychological problems than those in single care but did not deviate significantly from those in nuclear families.
  - 3-5 year olds who spend equal time in their parent's respective homes after a separation show less psychological problems than those living mainly or only with one parent. The differences between children in JCP and original families were not statistically significant.
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## Additional information gained by a longitudinal cohort

- Selection bias into the different living arrangements
- Longitudinal studies have information about family characteristics **before** the parental separation
- Lack of studies on preschoolers

# Conclusions



# Scientific answers regarding the concerns about shared parenting

- Stress? *No*
  - Difficulties keeping peer relations? *Yes in Australia, No in Sweden*
  - Increased exposure to parental conflict? *Probably not*
  - Spoiled children? *Potentially*
  - Disturbed attachment relations? *Not sufficiently studied*
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# Scientific answers regarding the assumed benefits of JPC

- Facilitates good relations with both parents yes  
→ No loss of attachment figures
- The child keeps both parent's material, social and relational resources yes
- Love and boundaries yes

## **Studies on children 0-2 yrs are scarce**



- Relationships/ associations between children's health and living arrangements have been studied-**not effects of JPC**
  - Factors that benefit children or hinder them from thriving in JPC have not been sufficiently studied
  - **No studies** on children from 3 yrs have found children's health to be **worse in JPC than in single care**
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# Thank you!

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