



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 46
Issue 2 June

Article 2

2019

Crime and Mental Health Problems in Norway - a Zero-Sum Game?

Dag Leonardsen

Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, dag.leonardsen@inn.no

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

Recommended Citation

Leonardsen, Dag (2019) "Crime and Mental Health Problems in Norway - a Zero-Sum Game?," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 46 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol46/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

Crime and Mental Health Problems in Norway — a Zero-Sum Game?

Dag Leonardsen

Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences

Through a historical overview, the author analyses the Norwegian welfare society and the limits of a social-engineering approach to social problems. While economic growth and welfare benefits expanded for many years, so did registered crime and mental problems. This paradox gives a justification for challenging established ways of thinking about social prevention policies. Since the turn of the century, crime figures have decreased while the state of mental health has worsened. The author argues that if the price of the suppression of crime is the depression of mind, then the gains are indeed pyrrhic.

Keywords: Social prevention, mental health, crime, social engineering, Norway

Introduction

In the 1970s, social scientists in Norway warned against a development in which prevention of social problems would become increasingly more difficult as political control over the economy was waning. Leading politicians echoed the message, and governmental documents from this time disclosed a worry about increasing crime and drug problems concurrent with increasing economic turbulence. The decision to open the Norwegian economy to a European and global free trade market was synonymous with speeding up economic and social change, while political control would shrink. However, in accordance with social democratic ideology, the sovereign state should be capable of providing security for all citizens and safeguarding

social integration. For social democrats, an open economy would not impede such a promise, since shrinking governmental control of the economic system was to be compensated for by strong supportive measures directed towards the socio-cultural system. Broad varieties of welfare measures were continuously developed, and the idea of putting social values first was a guiding principle for the (Labour Party) government. Liberalism at the base (an open, free trade based economy) was accepted as long as one could implement social democracy in the superstructure.

Accordingly, the government gradually changed its strategies to prevent social problems. A rapid expansion of measures directed towards the family, the educational system (schools and kindergartens), crime and drug problems, child protection care, etc., took place, especially from the 1970s/1980s. Program policies built on action plans replaced a more structural and holistic way of thinking.

However, in spite of huge social investments, governmental as well as social science representatives continued in the following years to send worrying messages about a change in the social climate. If the economy was running smoothly, this was not the case with the socio-cultural system; if the politicians succeeded in producing enough goods, they did not succeed in producing meaning for everybody. Crime, drug problems, mental distress, loneliness, even poverty (labelled new-poverty) gradually arose on the political agenda. The political response to this situation was more of the same--more and stronger measures directed towards the socio-cultural system. In spite of what social scientists reported, no questions about systemic restrictions or value conflicts appeared. Instead, one hoped that ingenious social research in alliance with a strong political will to spend big money would cure the patient. The outcome was disappointing.

At the turn of the century, the picture changed. Norway, like many other countries, experienced a turn-around trend in registered crime. It was reasonable to ask if it was the social engineering strategy that finally worked out. In 1996, Garland wrote about "the myth of the sovereign crime control" and about limits to state interventionist strategies. However, at the turn of the century it seemed that Garland might have been proven wrong. When Alva and Gunnar Myrdal, two famous Swedish social scientists and politicians, declared in the 1930s that "we can prevent—

technically it is possible to quite a high degree—illness, crime and asocial tendencies of different sort” (cited in Pratt, 2008, p. 130), this prophecy could now have become true—at least concerning crime. Or, is such a conclusion premature?

To answer this question we have to ask what the criteria for success are. Western governments, in their eagerness to combat social problems, have tended to split different symptoms of social disruption into separate and (apparently) unique sectors, each with their own specialized strategies. This way, social problems have been turned into social engineering challenges that should (and could) be handled by way of professional guidance. However, while (the majority of) registered crime in Norway has decreased during the last 15 years, mental problems have not. It seems that a positive trend in the war against crime has been accompanied by a comparative growth in mental suffering. Accordingly, one could ask if mental health problems in today’s Norway merely represent another symptom (in addition to crime) of an unchanged (or even worsened) social climate—a climate in which the struggle for recognition and respect are as challenging as ever, but where social strain is expressed in a different way than before. Have striking in problems (like mental suffering) replaced striking out problems (like crime)? If this is the case, this should be a challenge even for criminologists.

In this article, I shall first describe, primarily referring to written public documents, the main changes in social problems and social prevention strategies in Norway since WWII, and document how the government gradually changed focus concerning how to prevent social problems. This change was based on the assumption that welfare policy strategies could compensate for a lack of macro-economic control. As a part of this account, I shall present what the politicians themselves described as “the welfare paradox”: the fact that crime and other social problems increased in parallel with a huge expansion of different preventive measures. Why did a combination of economic prosperity and social welfare investments not produce (as expected) less crime (until the turn of the century) and less social strain?

Next, I shall address the interesting observation that, from the turn of the century, registered crime decreased, while mental health problems seemed to increase. How can we

explain this paradox? While it is impossible to prove any strict causal link between these two observations, I want to present a hypothesis (nothing more than that) that the relationship could be more than coincidental. Are the decreasing crime figures an indication that our society has become more socially integrated, or are social tensions today only expressed in another language? Is much of present-day crime prevention a type of window-dressing strategy that replaces one type of problem (crime) with another type of problem (mental distress)? Criminologists have argued that people in Japan, due to Confucian/Buddhist/Shintoist values, are policing themselves—hence so little crime in this country (Leonardsen, 2004). In this article I ask if a neo-conservative/neo-liberalist set of values fill the same disciplining role as “Asian” values do in Japan. The result might be less crime, but at the cost of more problems, like eating disorders, suicide, anxiety, depression, alcohol/drug dependency, electronic addiction/gambling, etc. As pointed out by Young (1999, p. 156), there is a sense in which the conservatives are completely correct: “If you wish to maintain an orderly society which is in essence unfair and inequitable you must train the individuals within it to accept the world as it is.” Maybe the Norwegian coin that shows little crime on its upper side has another side that discloses a strenuous social climate.

In line with Wilkinson and Pickett (2010, p. 26), one could dispute strategies where health and social problems “tend to be treated by policy makers as if they were quite separate from one another, each needing separate services and remedies.” Low crime rates are not all there is to “a good society.” Even though crime figures might be used as radar for reporting interesting qualities about a society, one should not draw rapid conclusions from law-abidingness to social harmony (as the case of Japan might illustrate, see Leonardsen, 2004, 2010). What type of actions (for example, alcohol consumption) that happen to fall into the category of “crime,” or, alternatively, are defined as “social (but not legal) problems” will vary in time (historically) and space (culturally)? Crime is like a sponge (Christie, 2004) that can absorb a broad variety of actions. If criminology is the study of crime, and crime is ephemeral, one can easily see that it is problematic to delimit criminology to fluctuating formal criteria (i.e., what is forbidden by law). If less crime is

accompanied by increased mental depression, little is gained, and one could ask if criminologists should focus more on general social conditions and less on crime in itself. By asking these questions, this paper engages in the debate on “public criminology” (Christie et al., 2011; Loader & Sparks, 2011) and “public sociology” (Burawoy, 2005), asking the pertinent question: what is (really) the problem? Based on my historical presentation on the next pages I want to pay attention to a tendency among politicians to abdicate from a value-based debate on social problems and instead confine oneself to a sectored, professionalised (evidence-based), and (often) instrumental approach.

Let me start with an overview of the way Norwegian authorities have interpreted and reacted to social problems since 1945. What did “giving priority to social prevention” mean in different periods?

Norway 1945-2016: From Economic to Socio-cultural Intervention

Crime prevention in Norway started out as a fight against poverty and a struggle for universal social inclusion. Crime was regarded as only one of many different expressions of social problems related to deprivation. The solution to the crime problem (and other social problems) was to create a socially integrated society through national control of the economy (from regional and labor market policy to housing policy), and a strong redistributive welfare state (universal social benefits). This approach was the recipe that would bring society into social harmony. The inspiration from Keynes and Beveridge was obvious. What little crime there was would vanish because of collective redistributive action; this was the social democratic credo.

Accordingly, work and welfare became two sides of the same coin. The anticipation was that all types of social problems would fade as economic growth, full employment, and a universal social security system was safeguarded. The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Labour became the two dominant institutions to remove distress, insecurity, and inequality. There was no disagreement that there was a complete overlap of interests between the economic and the socio-cultural system. What was beneficial for Norway, Inc. was beneficial for its citizens. “The

Construction State” became almost synonymous to “The Welfare State,” and abolishing crime and other social problems could be converted into a question of money to meet well-known needs (and not, as later on, a question of knowledge and expertise to meet complex human needs). The period from 1945 and into the 1960s was a period of optimism and enthusiasm.

However, reading governmental papers and the party programs of the (governing) Labour Party (LP) from the mid-1960s discloses an increasing uneasiness about social conditions in the country. A White Paper published in 1960 (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1960–1961), reported that the crime increase was “explosive.” As a background to understanding this development, Labour Party Leader Trygve Bratteli talked in 1965 at the Labour Party National Conference (LPNC) about the profound economic and technical changes that had taken place since 1945, and continued:

Modern societies—to an increasing extent characterized by science and technical innovation—seem to have entered an essentially new type of development. What is happening is that some very profound changes take place at a very high speed. However, these rapid changes that take place in the everyday lives of ordinary people will lead to uneasiness and uncertainty, and it will lead to significant industrial and social problems. (LPNC 1965, p. 147)

Increasing crime was an often-cited illustration of this “uneasiness.” At the time of Bratteli’s speech, crime had been on a continuous upward trajectory for many years, and the registered number of crimes investigated by the police (per 100.000 inhabitants) doubled through the 1960s. The Labour Party’s Principal Program from 1969 reported:

Even in societies that have reached the highest material and technical level of standard one can register discontent, human callousness, conflicts and dissatisfaction. The industrial society has not succeeded in developing human ways of being together that satisfies basic social and psychological needs. We experience that people are alienated and that the competitive society and the one-dimensional cultivation of material goods generate a barren and empty life for many people. (Labour Party, 2001)

To the extent that this description gives a fair portrait of the situation, the political ambition of “economic growth and contentment” from the early 1960s had been only partly achieved. While the long-term program from 1957 had promised to “pay close attention to preventive health and social work” (The Ministry of Finance, 1957, p. 72), in the early 1970s public documents and social research indicated that something had gone wrong (e.g., book titles such as “The Myth of the Welfare State” [Norway] and “The Hollow Welfare State” [Sweden]). The sudden increase in social security expenditures (the old means-tested poor law) represented only one worrying facet, as well as increasing crime and drug problems. The politicians had to admit that the power balance between market forces and political control had developed in favor of the former:

Largely we are still hampered by insufficient tools for political control. We have too little knowledge about the society we want to change and the world we are a part of. We have to obtain more knowledge, more statistics, and more research documentation in all fields of importance for the change of society. (Kleppe, LPNC, 1969, p. 158)

The perspective Per Kleppe—one of the main strategists behind the Labour Party policy—presented, was twofold: (1) A socially integrated society was dependent on political control over the economy; and (2) proper political control was dependent on knowledge-based documentation and valid statistical information. In other words, the realization of the welfare state ideal had to be based on a happy marriage between political voluntarism and the developing social sciences. Since the economists had been successful in saving a wrecked economy in the 1930s (e.g., Keynes), it was now reasonable to expect that the social scientists could help in solving the evolving problems in the socio-cultural system. Party Leader Trygve Bratteli commented on this:

During a period of huge changes and reform of our society, we have to give priority to the science about man and his environment, about the body and the health of our soul, about contact and living together, about human society and about human history. In every regard we have to invite the

help that science to an increasing extent can supply us with.
(LPNC, 1965, p. 149)

Since the politicians assumed that social problems could be solved through a confident cooperation between themselves and social science researchers, these problems did not provoke any political questions regarding value priorities. Strong political commitment to intervene in the market processes in combination with a comparable strong belief in the problem-solving capability of the social sciences was what it took to stem crime and social uncertainties. Due to a well-equipped toolbox, no one should fear for his/her overall living conditions. In Norway, the government took control via a broad set of policy strategies.

However, with Kleppe's declarations about lack of political control over the economy, the political priorities in the next decades might seem surprising. While until the early 1970s politicians had had at their disposal governmental instruments that could soften some of the negative effects of the liberalized market economy, they now headed towards a further weakening of their own political control. Already in 1960, Norway joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which meant a gradual deconstruction of customs and tariff barriers. The immediate result was rapid geographical changes with extensive social ramifications. Then, from the mid-1970s, an international depression resulted in a paradigmatic change in economic thinking. Keynesian "demand-side economy" had to give way. From then on, monetarist principles "became the international policy to which *all* governments committed to an open world economy felt *obliged to* subscribe" (Gamble 1986, p. 34, italics added). The space for political manoeuvre, even in social democratic-oriented Norway, was in decline. This represented a serious political dilemma:

I will go as far as to say that I do not think we are able to carry out our aims as for our welfare policy in a society that is so strongly dominated by capitalist influence as Norway is today. The implementation of our welfare program takes as a premise quite a radical change of society. We are not running for "adaptation policy." (Kleppe, LP's Conference on welfare politics, 1971, pp. 81–82)

In a situation with increasing social problems (the concept of the “client producing system” now became common), and with weakened political control of important economic variables, how was the government, with all its political ambitions regarding social prevention, to handle these challenges?

In a speech to the National Congress in 1971, Minister of Social Welfare Odd Højdahl declared that it had come as a big surprise that social problems escalated in parallel to economic affluence and social reforms being attained: “[We] thought that the abolishment of mass poverty, improved housing, and better educational and working conditions, would make main elements of the welfare policy superfluous. However, it was not that simple” (LPNC 1971, p. 230). This “welfare paradox” (less poverty, more crime and social problems) was hard to understand for those politicians who had their historical background in the 1930s (high unemployment) and the 1940s (war economy).

However, with the given priorities, there were no options for turning. “The strong demands for efficiency and productivity in different sectors of society make many people fall by the wayside,” Højdahl declared, but “the only solution is further economic growth. I will ask you not to equal economic growth with social problems” (LPNC 1971, pp. 254–255). The general perspective was (like in 1945) that what was good for the economy was good for people in general. Accordingly, the way of understanding the social problems of the 1970s was much the same as in 1945: it was through rapid (free trade-based) economic growth in combination with a broad variety of governmental measures that a crime resistant and socially integrated society could be sustained. The governing optimism was unaffected.

Even though the Labour government through the first half of the 1970s had demonstrated a strong will to implement an extensive welfare policy (including regional, industrial, financial and labour measures), gradually the general economic development in Europe changed. A process of abdication from political control of the economy became increasingly dominant at a time when the impetus for change escalated (Norway became a turbulent oil economy in 1969, while at the same time the government prepared for Norwegian participation in the EU). However, the political ambitions remained the same. Taking care of soft values was more important than ever. Within

the framework of what was called a “new welfare policy,” the Labour Party continuously talked about “giving social values pre-eminence,” underlining that from that point on social values should be a premise for all types of policy planning. Stronger focus was directed at developing what was called “self-supporting networks,” not least because one had gradually reached an awareness that “the state cannot make people happy.” All these declarations were formulated at the same time as the winds of change were accelerating. The “panting competition society” (Vice-President Reiulf Steen, LPNC, 1973, p. 62) should from now on be transformed in the direction of “a real equal society where people have a chance of experiencing peace and prospects for developing all their abilities” (Steen, p. 62). However, such an ambitious aim could (according to Steen) be attained only if stronger measures were introduced:

For the Labour Party there should be absolutely no doubt concerning the main perspective: by intervening directly into the societal system, by removing the *causes* of the problems, through the regional policy, through measures like rehabilitation allowance and rehabilitation employment, we will reach a society with people that function in accordance to their talents rather than investing a lot of money to repair damages evolving due to cold and inhuman conditions of competition in the labour market and in society in general. (LPNC, 1973, p. 66)

In short, the government continued having high ambitions for building what in political terms was designated a qualitatively better society. The trust in the social sciences for supporting the politicians with the necessary know-how to maneuver in a complex and mobile society remained uncontested. Facing the question of how much change society could take, the Minister of Education and Research declared that “one of the most important tools for political governing that should be implemented is an action program for social research” (Førde, 1980). The challenge was to make the social sciences a helping hand to solve the contradiction between mobility and how much turbulence people could take.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the Labour Party Program (1981) described the social climate in Norway as follows:

The strong economic growth has had its price...The rapid changes have created uneasiness, alienation and insecurity about the future. New human problems have appeared: new illnesses and new troubles. Drug abuse increases...Beneath the surface of wealth, we can find huge human and social problems that are unsolvable within the present system of dominating capitalistic features. (Labour Party, 2001, p. 14)

The Party Leader, Reiulf Steen, declared in 1981 that, "not at any time since WWII has social security been more vulnerable than now" (LPNC, 1981, p. 58).

Vice President Einar Førde expressed his worries by saying that "we can fill up a medium big Norwegian city with children suffering from what is known as 'serious lack of care'" adding that the youngsters' optimism for the future had changed in the direction of pessimism and fear. The *No-Future Generation* had arrived. In 1983, social scientist Kolberg published a book titled "The Welfare State—Goodbye?" Five years later, Marklund (Sweden) published "Paradise Lost? The Nordic Welfare States and the Recession 1975–1985." Both titles indicate the focus of the welfare state debate all through the period 1980–2010.

These were the years of a general right wing turn in politics. Norway, now economically strengthened through its new status as an oil nation, was no exception to this general trend of welfare contraction. The Labour Party's hegemonic status was shrinking. During the period 1981–86/1989–90, and 1997–2000/2001–2005, Norway had conservative/centre-right governments inspired by neo-liberal thinking. While the Norwegian Labour Party held a rhetorical distance from this ideology, the neo-liberal influence was identifiable also within the social democratic camp. For one thing, during the 1980s and 1990s the party strengthened the course towards further European integration. After the party had lost a referendum in 1972 about Norwegian membership in the EU, a new proposal was launched in 1994. Once again, the Norwegian electorate voted No. Nevertheless, the Labour Party was a driving force for connecting Norway tighter with the European free trade market. When the campaign for full membership in the EU failed, the strategy (which succeeded) was to make Norway a member of the European internal market. The implication of this was more power delegated to Brussels and to

market forces, and, in spite of earlier claims, a weakening of national political power.

Furthermore, during the period with a conservative government (1981–1986), key members of the Labour Party prepared an ideological shift away from governmental and bureaucratic solutions, heavily dependent on taxation and centralized arrangements, and invited a new debate on freedom, modernization and market solutions. This took place at the National Congress in 1987. As Norway had become more integrated into the European, as well as the global economy, one had to acknowledge that, “the task for political organisations should be the setting of political aims and defining the framework. After that, it is the leaders’ and their employees’ challenge to reach the given aims. We believe this will redeem innovation and engagement” (Brundtland, LPNC, 1987, p. 21). Due to stronger demands among the electorate for more individualized and tailor-made services, one should, Brundtland argued, be more sensitive to such demands. The main challenge was to see that services were offered on equal terms. Accordingly, it would be a good strategy to bring competition into the public sector. From mixed economy to mixed administration—this was the message. The choice between public and private operation had to be made according to what was most convenient for reaching the given aim. Furthermore, people had to show more responsibility themselves: “It is a main challenge to follow a strategy where people are empowered to handle their problems themselves” (Brundtland, LPNC 1987, p. 134). One precaution was taken: “We shall offer no compromises when it comes to stating that health, social security and education are so basic common needs that we will not allow commercialisation of these services. In this connection I will recommend dogmatism,” Førde concluded (LPNC, 1987, p. 73).

How did this ideological shift affect the social climate in the country? Had the politicians’ promises about giving priority to social prevention and the alliance with the social sciences produced a better society?

Social research, public documents, as well as party programmes, disclose a rather worrying answer to these questions. In the Labour Party’s program for 1986–89, one could read that “a big and increasing number of children and youngsters are being

neglected, maltreated; they drop out of school and end up drifting. Queues for getting financial assistance are increasing" (e.g., increasing unemployment rates and increasing housing costs) (Labour Party, 1986–1989, p. 74). In the 1990s, worrying signals referred to "too many children getting too little care and supervision," and cases of incest, child maltreatment and children living on the streets represented illustrations of this (LP Election Manifesto 1990–1993, p. 53).

The Labour Party Program from 1992 declared that "loneliness, fear, increase in psychiatric sufferings, increase in suicides, even among children and young people, indicate that time and efforts do not suffice for giving the necessary care we should offer each other" (Labour Party, 1992, pp. 15–16).

An increase in crime (especially serious crimes) was part of the picture (until the turn of the century): while in 1980 there were 3.3 persons per 1.000 charged for crime, this figure increased to 6.4 in 1998 (The Ministry of Finance, 2000–2001). In the "Principles and Values" program from 1996, the Labour Party talked about problems like lack of social network in society, little reciprocity and contact among people, increasing crime, drug abuse, and mental illness. Suicide was one of the most frequent reasons for death among young people, mirroring increasing loneliness and social isolation among people in general. In 1996, Party Leader Jagland announced that a new under-class and new class divisions were emanating. At the turn of the century, poverty had become an essential problem to combat; some 70,000 children were living below the poverty level (LP Election Manifesto, 2001–2005); "many children are not in a position to have their dinner every day; they never go for a holiday; they cannot participate in school excursions" (Jagland, LPNC 2000, p. 6). A national committee reporting on the situation within Child Welfare Protection (NOU, 2000, p. 12) claimed that the challenges were formidable, and that preventive work had been neglected. Marginalizing forces in all fields of upbringing were described as very strong. The committee presented 50 recommendations, warned against simplistic solutions, and underlined the importance of focusing the value foundation in the social preventive work. In a White Paper (Ministry of Social and Health Affairs, 2001–2002), the government addressed eating disorders, loneliness and isolation problems, lack of care, maltreatment, behavioural misconduct,

drug problems, bullying, and lack of well-being as the most serious challenges. Headache, depression, and stomach/back pains among youth signalled serious and extensive psychosocial problems. Another White Paper (The Ministry of Finance, 2000–2001) expressed worries about pressure regarding sex, competition, work, commerce, and scarcity of time.

Indicators on stress, dropout from school, reports to the Child Welfare Services, loneliness, suicide, drugs, use of antidepressants, and sleeping pills, disclosed a negative development. According to the governmental “Strategy plan for social prevention” (Government, 2009), the share of young people having big problems or experiencing social maladjustment seemed to increase rather than decrease. In a broad study on living conditions among youth, the research institution NOVA (2014) reported about a well-adapted (little crime) and largely home-staying generation, but with mental challenges (stress). The most recent data (Bakken, 2017) confirms this picture, but warns against a marked increase in self-reported depression, especially among young girls. The number of respondents reporting about experience of loneliness is the highest ever. The Norwegian Institute of Health (Bang Nes & Clench-Aas, 2011) has documented an increase in the use of tranquilizers, ADHD medication, antidepressants and sleeping pills, as well as more people receiving disability benefits. Nowadays, the leading reason for people being absent from work is anxiety and depression (Olsen & Nystuen, 2017). In his annual speech 2017, the Director of FHI had exclusion of youth as main focus in his presentation. Mjaavatn and Frostad (2016) report that 22% of girls (only 3,5% of the boys) in high school (aged 16) suffer from emotional problems—a doubling of figures in the span of twelve years. Prescription of antidepressants increased by 57% from 2004 to 2014 among girls 15–19 years. Lack of self-confidence and dissatisfaction with their own bodies is an often-mentioned problem among these girls. These days, the Norwegian government is preparing for a new curriculum in schools, called “coping with life.”

While the referenced data may indicate that mental health problems in Norway have become more pronounced, the crime trend appears to have turned downwards. Taking all the necessary precautions about the difficulties in reading crime statistics

(including victim statistics), I take as a given premise for the further discussion that Norway (like many other modern societies) has become a less crime-prone society the last 15 years. From this outset I shall now move from the historical-descriptive presentation to the analytical-normative discussion, and ask what is really gained if less crime is accompanied by more social stress? Are we facing a kind of zero-sum game where victories in crime prevention correspond to losses in mental well-being? What kind of challenge does the new pattern of crime and social problems present to criminologists?

Discussion: Crime and Mental Stress—Depression of Mind Through the Suppression of Crime?

First, there are many nuances to the story presented above. The UN has for 12 consecutive years declared Norway to have the best living conditions in the world. Norway (and the Nordic welfare state model in general) has on many occasions been declared a success—even by *The Economist* (2013). I agree with these positive evaluations. However, my query is not if the good reputation is well deserved, but to ask whether Norwegian society in the present phase of the celebrated welfare state should be more alert to “silent suffering,” and ask if young people these days increasingly channel their stress and frustration inwards rather than outwards. Rampant crime will generally trigger populist and (often) punitive reactions that, in turn, will instigate political responses. Rampant mental problems, however, are not threatening public order in the same way and can therefore more easily pass under the political radar. But these problems are no less damaging for the social integration in a society than crime is.

My historic overview has shown that the hope of finding the sociological (socio-cultural system) correspondent to Keynes (economic system) was too optimistic. When the economy broke down in the 1930s, Keynes found the recipe to restore the balance in the economic system. The social scientists of the 1970s (and forwards) were unable to do the same towards the socio-cultural system (with the exception from crime post 2000). In Sweden (another member of the celebrated Nordic Welfare

State), the social scientist Bo Rothstein (2009, p. 126) expressed his worries about this situation with this statement:

Therefore, it is not unreasonable to regard the development of increasing mental problems among children and youth as a very destroying civilization critique that should lead to a fundamental re-evaluation among researchers concerning the focus of Swedish welfare research. This is not the case. Instead, one propagates about how well the Nordic welfare model works to create good health for people, and the questions related to problems among children and youth are ignored...Something has to be fundamentally wrong when such a rich society with a well-developed welfare policy produces that many unhappy children and youth.

This observation is, as we have seen, highly relevant for Norway as well, and Rothstein touches upon the central challenge in my presentation: high welfare expenditures in one of the world's richest countries do not pay off very well when it comes to mental well-being. The inner strain in the Norwegian society is probably no less today than 20, 30, or 40 years ago. The opposite might be the situation. Even though decreasing crime should be appreciated, for a sociologist it is the broad picture covering both striking out and striking in problems that matters. How can we understand "the crime—mental health enigma" in context? Of course, statistical co-appearance does not signify a causal relationship, but this should not prevent us from asking if discipline/control/early intervention strategies in criminal policy could have repercussions when it comes to mental health. As a starting point for my discussion, let me present an analytical model.

My sociological presumption is based on the following premises:

- The socio-cultural system: if individuals (qua individuals) and societies (qua collectivities), are to thrive, some basic values have to be safeguarded. The better these values are taken care of, the better are the chances for optimizing social integration and social welfare (little crime and sound mental health).

- The economic system: if an open free market economy is to prosper, there are other (often contradictory) values that have to be given precedence. Figure 1 represents an ideal type presentation of these respective values.

Figure 1: Ideal type of the economic and the socio-cultural system

Economic system	Socio-cultural system
Efficiency	Time
Competition	Cooperation/solidarity
Achievement	Recognition, respect
Qualification/certification	Open admittance
Strategic rationality	Value rationality
Individualism	Collectivism
Egoism	Altruism
Flexibility	Predictability/control/safety
Liquidity	Being anchored
Independence	Dependency

The space does not permit an elaboration of each couple of concepts (see Leonardsen, 2015). It suffices to say that taken as ideal types (in Max Weber’s sense) there is an obvious value conflict between the two systems. This means that when the balance between these two sets of values changes, one will easily (but not nomothetically) experience a zero-sum situation. As documented above, during the last thirty years, the economic value system has increasingly gained precedence at the cost of the socio-cultural value system. What one side has gained, the other has lost. The result has been a tougher social climate.

In “Crime in Japan: Paradise Lost?” (Leonardsen, 2010) I asked if Japan (around 2010) was facing a situation where “the

suppression of crime" had come at the price of "the suppression of mind?" Like in Norway, Japanese society had succeeded in turning a negative crime trend through the 1990s, but experienced, at the same time, an increase in suicides and social withdrawal (*hikikomori*) among youth. One used to say about Japanese people that they are "policing themselves" (Bailey, 1976) due to a Confucian/Buddhist ideology based on self-reflection, shame, and discipline (Leonardsen, 2004). The impact of this cultural superstructure has been a strong counter-force against striking out processes rooted in rapid economic and social change in Japan. Accordingly, low crime rates in this country have been explained in cultural terms (Confucianism/Buddhism as vaccination against crime).

Moving our eyes to the West, it is relevant to ask to what extent neo-liberalism (cf. free trade economy) and neo-conservatism (more individual responsibility) could be described as functional equivalents to Confucianism/Buddhism in Japan. Do both these (originally) Western thought systems generate strong self-control with their accompanying self-blaming consequences? Slogans like "Back to Basics" (the British Conservatives, 1995) and "Back to Family Values" (the first Bush administration) have had their corresponding, government-initiated campaigns in Norway (a special "Value Commission" in 1998), with a message connoting much of the self-disciplining Asia value foundation. I am not arguing that neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism are ideological cousins of Confucianism/Buddhism. Neither am I saying that Norway is England or the U.S. It is not. However, I am asking whether the consequences of an economic man model in alliance with a moral conservatism, of which we can find elements of even in Norway, might be comparable at the individual level. The distance between an Asian shame culture and a Western, neo-liberal culture, based on a de-centred way of governing, with auto-regulated or auto-correcting individuals, might not be so big.

A starting point for such a discussion could be the work of French philosopher Dufour (2008), who in his book "The Art of Shrinking Heads: On the New Servitude of the Liberated in the Age of Total Capitalism," has questioned the effects of neo-liberalism on people's mental health. According to Dufour, the Kantian "critical subject" and the Freudian "neurotic subject"

has in post-modern society been replaced by a “post-modern subject” (Dufour talks about “an anthropological mutation”), characterized by flexibility, adaptability—and rootlessness. In post-modern society, the autonomous subject experiences strong pressure to create her/his own unique identity. In the era of “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2000), the individual inhabits a borderless space with apparently total freedom, and a “with consumption as all things” aim and meaning. The market has become the ultimate rationality for guiding us. The problem is that the market cannot create meaning. Dufour raises the challenging question of whether neo-liberalism has made people internalise the old slogan “every man the architect of his own fortune.” If one fails in a society with so many options, there is no one to blame but oneself. This might easily generate self-repressing and self-controlling mechanisms that can manifest as mental health problems. These problems (like depression, drug addiction, etc.) are not epiphenomena constructed by the media but signs of a crisis that especially affects young people (Dufour, 2008).

The same perspective is echoed in the debate on positive thinking. Schwartz (2015, p. 4) writes about mental problems in modern society (“an explosive growth of depression,” p. 3) where an individualistic culture biases people towards making causal attributions that focus on internal rather than external causal factors. People are told they are free to choose, while a substantial many rather experience a lack of control in their lives. Davis (2015, p. 4), focusing on what he calls “The happiness industry,” argues that, “the future of successful capitalism depends on our ability to combat stress, misery, illness, and put relaxation, happiness and wellness in their place.” Those in a competitive society who do not keep up with demands turn their disappointments inwards instead of outwards.

In Norway, the media debate on youth and mental health problems has for some years centred on concepts like “Generation Clever” or “Generation Performance” (cf. the PISA examinations). Private company language, like “deliver the goods” and “it’s all up to you,” has become common speech not only within the economic system, but in the socio-cultural system as well (schools and even kindergartens). Everyone has to pull her/his weight.

Changes in mental health conditions in a society are hard to interpret and analyze, and perhaps Dufour (2008) and other scholars of worry are painting a too dreary picture of life in post-modern society. However, my historical overview, and the fact that The World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified depression as the number two cause of death (prospected to be number one in 2030) in Western countries, should invite a discussion on how to interpret the development of mental health problems during the last few years (Ehrenberg, 2010). Even though it is difficult to understand what we are really measuring when we talk about mental problems (for example, what amount of change is due to a growth in diagnoses and diagnosing professions, and what is due to real changes?), compared to the huge amount of money spent on mental disorder prevention, the situation is paradoxical.

When Merton (1968) presented his anomie theory (notice: also called strain theory), he wrote (in a Durkheimian spirit) about different types of adaptation to disjunctions between goals and means in a society. People could strike out as “innovators” or “rebels,” but, alternatively, they could strike inwards and become “retreatists.” The relevant point for my discussion is that strain in a society can have many different outlets, of which crime is but one. Of course, decreasing crime rates should be celebrated as a pleasant and likely indication of social integration, but not without precautions (see Christie, 2004). It is the total picture of deviance that should have the main attention, even for criminologists.

A society's health condition taken as a whole is dependent on many different variables, and these variables should be seen in connection to each other. When Freud in 1929 wrote about “Civilization and its Discontents,” he wrote about human pain due to the conflict between Eros (love) and Thanatos (death). Nowadays, this cultural discontent should rather be presented in Mertonian terms as a clash between cultural goals (success) and certain groups' lack of access (by conventional means) to achieving those goals. In a modern version of Merton, Jock Young (2007, p. 32) talks about the bulimic society, “where massive cultural inclusion is accompanied by systematic structural exclusion”—a society that both absorbs (through mass media, mass education, consumer markets, etc.) and rejects (through

unequal chances of taking full advantage of these arenas). Accordingly, the combination of cultural inclusion and economic exclusion is for Young the key to the humiliation and resentment experienced by those with the least resources. "The exclusive society" (Young, 1999) is a society that produces relative deprivation and ontological insecurity in a way that is denigrating and humiliating. Not having access to even the lower reaches of the labour market, failing to achieve in a middle-class-oriented school system, or living in poverty amidst affluence, is likely to produce tensions with outcomes that can strike inwards as well as outwards.

Having this broader perspective in mind, I end my presentation about the successful Norwegian welfare society by being a "mood killer." In spite of all the well-deserved praise of this model, there is reason to listen carefully to the aforementioned comment by Bo Rothstein, namely that the mental health situation among young people today might be taken as a very civilization destroying critique. Something is wrong when so much money is spent on welfare measures, but still so many are unhappy about their lives.

The question remains: how should this challenge be met? If Wilkinson and Pickett are correct (2010), politicians should stop treating social problems as separate phenomena with no internal connections. Doctors and nurses treat ill health, police and prisons deal with crime, remedial teachers and educational psychologists tackle educational problems, and social workers and other health-promotion specialists deal with "the rest." The results of all these interventions are modest, while new problems are continuously recreated. An open market economy based on liberalistic principles is hard to combine with a political and sociological demand for equality, which, in turn, is important for social integration. No doubt, Norway has pursued a policy of equality over many years. However, this policy of re-distribution has not been enough to prevent increasing social problems. Neither have a huge number of action plans (from bullying- and poverty- to crime- and drug-programs) had the expected outcomes (Leonardsen, 2015). So what conclusion could be drawn from this paradox?

My intention is not to undermine the importance of practical, short-term, and imaginative social reforms. Solving problems

will often invite delimited actions based on scarce resources. However, if the floor is wet, we should not restrict our efforts to wiping up with a rag. Someone has to look for the open water tap, and check if it can be turned off. At different times through the last forty years, Labour governments in Norway *did* recognize—at the rhetorical level—that it would be difficult, even impossible, to find social preventive measures that would work without political control of the economy. Since that time, this control has declined essentially. According to Fukuyama (1999, p. 4), “there is a widespread acknowledgement that in post-industrial societies further improvement cannot be achieved through ambitious social engineering.” The case of Norway, where such ambitions have reached unprecedented levels, should represent an interesting starting point for elaborating Fukuyama’s thesis.

Author’s note: Originally, the Labour Party documents were studied at The Norwegian Labour Movement Archives and Library in Oslo (<https://www.arbark.no/InEnglish.htm>). Later this material was digitized, and those documents are cited in this paper.

References

- Bailey, D. H. (1976). *Forces of order. Policing modern Japan*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Bakken, A. (2017). *Ungdata 2017: National results* (Nova Report 10/17). Retrieved from <http://www.hioa.no/Om-HiOA/Senter-for-velferds-og-arbeidslivsforskning/NOVA/Publikasjoner/Rapporter/2017/Ungdata-2017>
- Bang Nes, R., & Clench-Aas, J. (2011). Rapport no 2. Psykisk helse i Norge [Report No. 2. Mental health in Norway]. Folkeshelseinstituttet (FHI). Retrieved from <https://www.fhi.no/globalassets/dokumenterfiler/rapporter/2011/rapport-20112-psykisk-helse-i-norge.-tilstandsrapport-med-internasjonale-sammenligninger.pdf>
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Burawoy, M. (2005). For public sociology. *American Sociological Review*, 70(1), 4–28.
- Christie, N. (2004). *A suitable amount of crime*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Christie, N., Currie, E., Kennedy, H., Morgan, R., Laycock, G., Sim, J., Tombs, Jacqueline, & Walters, R. (2011). A symposium of reviews of Public Criminology? By Ian Loader and Richard Sparks. *British Journal of Criminology*, 51(4), 707–738.

- Davis, W. (2015). *The happiness industry*. London: Verso.
- Dufour, D.-R. (2008). *The art of shrinking heads: On the new servitude of the liberated in the age of total capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ehrenberg, A. (2010). *The weariness of the self: Diagnosing the history of depression in the contemporary age*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Freud, S. (2002). *Civilization and its discontents*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fukuyama, F. (1999). *The great disruption*. London: Profile books.
- Førde, E. (1980, February). Forskningen har gjort politikken mer rasjonell [Research has done politics more rational]. (Interview). *Studentforum*. Oslo.
- Gamble, A. (1986). The political economy of freedom. In R. Levitas (Ed.), *The ideology of the new right* (pp. 25–54). Oxford: Polity Press.
- Government. (2009). *Regjeringens strategi for forebygging*. [The Government's strategy for social prevention]. Retrieved from <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/jd/vedlegg/rapporter/forebyggingsstrategi.pdf>
- Kolberg, J. E. (1983). *Farvel til velferdsstaten?* [The Welfare State – Good-bye?]. Oslo: Cappelen.
- Labour Party. (n.d.). Long term programs and election manifestos, 1975–2009. Retrieved from <https://www.arbeiderpartiet.no/om/historien-om-arbeiderpartiet/historiske-partiprogrammer/>
- Labour Party. (2001). *Principles and values. Vi vil!* [We Will! Norwegian Political Party Programs 1884–2001]. CD, Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). (1969, 1981).
- Labour Party National Congress (LPNC). (n.d.). Records, 1969–2009. Retrieved from <https://www.arbeiderpartiet.no/om/historien-om-arbeiderpartiet/historiske-partiprogrammer/>
- Leonardsen, D. (2004) *Japan as a low-crime nation*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Leonardsen, D. (2010) *Crime in Japan: Paradise lost?* Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Leonardsen, D. (2015). *Forebyggingens historie* [The history of social prevention]. Oslo: NOVUS.
- Loader, I., & Sparks, R. (2011). *Public criminology?* Palgrave: Abingdon.
- Marklund, S. (1988). *Paradise lost? The Nordic welfare states and the recession 1975-1985*. Lund: Arkiv.
- Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure*. New York: The Free Press.
- Ministry of Social Affairs. (1960-1961). *Om barn og unge med atferdsproblemer. Sosialdepartementet*. [On children and young people with behavioral problems, White Paper no. 51, 1960–61.] Ministry of Social Affairs, Oslo.

- Ministry of Social and Health Affairs. (2001-2002). *Oppvekst og levekår for barn og unge I Norge. Sosial- og helsedepartementet*. [Living conditions for children and young people in Norway, White Paper no. 39, 2001-2002, Ministry of Social and Health Affairs, Oslo].
- Mjaavatr, P. E., & Frostad, P. (2016, 1 Dec.). Jentene sliter mest [The girls struggle the hardest]. *Klassekampen*.
- NOU 2000: 12 Barnevernet i Norge [Child protection in Norway]. Oslo.
- NOVA. (2014). Årets Ung-data tall er klare. Retrieved from <http://www.hioa.no/Aktuelle-saker/AArets-Ungdata-tall-er-klare>
- Olsen, B., & Nystuen, P. (2017). *Arbeid og psykisk helse* [Work and mental health]. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Pratt, J. (2008). Scandinavian exceptionalism in an era of penal excess: Part I: The nature and roots of Scandinavian exceptionalism. *British Journal of Criminology*, 48, 119-137.
- Rothstein, B. (2009). *Hjernen er alene* [The brain is alone]. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Schwartz, B. (2003). *Pitfalls on the road to a positive psychology of hope*. Retrieved from <https://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/bschwar1/pitfalls.pdf>
- The Economist*. (2013, 2 Feb.). The secret of their success (special report).
- The Ministry of Finance. (1957). *Langtidsprogrammet 1958-61. Finansdepartementet*. [White Paper no. 67, The Long Term Program.] The Ministry of Finance, Oslo.
- The Ministry of Finance. (2000-2001). *Langtidsprogrammet for perioden 2002-2005. Finansdepartementet*. [The Long Term Program, 2002-2005, White Paper no. 30, 2000-2001.] The Ministry of Finance, Oslo.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2018). *Depression*. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs369/en/>
- Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2010). *The spirit level. Why equality is better for everyone*. London: Penguin Books.
- Young, J. (1999). *The exclusive society*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Young, J. (2007). *The vertigo of modernity*. London: SAGE Publications.