

## **Stepfamily prevalence in northern Sweden 1750-2007**

Jani Turunen & Martin Kolk

### *Introduction*

Using church record data from parishes in northern Sweden this paper we will analyze the prevalence of stepfamilies during an exceptionally long period in time; from 1750 to 2007. The historical research on stepfamilies is more limited than that concerning illegitimate births and parental death. This research is usually based on census data and historical sources such as letters and diaries (see eg Collins 1991; Phillips 1997) and has often focused on relationships at adult level. Living in a stepfamily is assumed to be negatively associated with the child's living conditions and outcomes because of increased competition with new family members for resources as well as negative discrimination, the so-called "Cinderella effect" (Willführ & Gagnon 2013). Stepfamilies have always existed but whereas they today are almost exclusively formed as a result of divorce and separation the cause of historic times usually been the one parent's early death.

In this paper we will present time series of stepfamilies spanning over the pre-industrial era of the mid- and late 18th century, the period of industrialization, the beginning and the peak of the Swedish welfare state and all the way up to modern time. The time period spans over high mortality and low divorce regimes to today's society with very low levels of parental death and high divorce rates. The time series will be presented separately for both stepfather and stepmother families. We will look at children as our unit of analysis, examining the share of children growing up with older/younger siblings and half siblings over time, additionally distinguishing between cases where the person grow up with a stepmother and a stepfather. Furthermore we will distinguish between cases when the separation of your biological parents were a result of death or after a divorce. Thus, we will see both how the massive changes in fertility, mortality, and divorce rates over the period resulted in very different patterns of step family formation. Much historical demography have for various reasons focused primarily on household structure over time (e.g. Laslett and Wall 1972; Ruggles and Brower 2003), and paid less content to kinship as defined by affine and consanguine links focusing more on kinship. Studying the number of full-siblings and step-siblings is simple and powerful way to create comparable time series over a longer period. It is not dependant on household registration but still in a powerful way captures the varying experiences over time in growing up in new families. Thus, it can create a valuable counterpart to previous household focused historical demography. It also puts the child in attention, something that is often missing when the unit of analysis is the household and household head. Consequently, we will be able to track the changes in the experience of growing up in a stepfamily rather than getting bogged down in comparing overall household structure over time, in which the destinies of individual children moving between households would be difficult to follow.

### *Data and Methods*

The study will be based on an exceptional combination of national level administrative register data for the second half of the 20th century, together with digitized parish data from Northern Sweden between 1750-1950. The historical data is collected by the Demographic Database in Umeå, and cover the Skellefteå region (Alm Stenflo 1994). The parishes followed over time are Skellefteå Stad,

Skellefteå församling, and Byske församling. The recent addition of parish data between 1900 and 1950 (POPLINK 2012) bridges an important gap in historical demography, and will allow for demographic analysis that can combine the perspectives of contemporary family sociology/demography, theories on the demographic transition, and traditional historical demography of pre-industrial populations.

We have information on the complete population of Sweden after 1960, including birth records linking children from their parents starting from 1932. For the historical data between 1750 to 1950 we have information on around 150,000 individuals, who all can be linked through marriage or a parent-child link to at least one other individual present in our parishes. We have high quality migration records, allowing us to keep track of the exposure inside our parishes at any time. Around a third of our dataset can be observed for the entire period within our parishes.

Our main results will be a time series of the number of younger/older siblings and half siblings through time. Thus, we can follow the percentage of all children who at age 15 have younger and older siblings, as well as younger and older half-siblings. This will give us a picture both of children growing up in a union, which later is disrupted by marriage/death of a partner, and the number of children growing up in a family in which one of the partners have children from a previous union. Additionally we will break down half siblings, into half siblings in which both the half-sibling parents are still alive. Thus, we can estimate the transformation of how the experience of step-families, changed from a situation characterized by family disruption caused by high mortality levels, to a situation characterized by high union stability in the 20th century. Finally we will look at sex-composition of half-siblings and siblings, and get an estimate on if there were gender differences in experiencing step-families, and indirectly, if the process of forming a step-union was influenced by the gender of previous children. The latter was likely more important historically when inheritance rules of farms (the region was in the beginning of the period dominated by farmers who owned their own land), than it was during industrialization and the second half of the 20th century.

### *Results and discussion*

We aim to present previously discussed measures of number of siblings and half siblings, decomposed by previously discussed characteristics in our conference manuscript. We believe that our long time-series will be of great importance to understand how step-families have changed through last centuries. Our result will inform both historical demography and general demography, in showing how the massive social, demography and economic changes in the 19th and 20th century dramatically influenced historical patterns of family formation.

### *References*

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