
調 査 研 究

Sweden's family policies and roller-coaster fertility

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Abstract

Sweden has experienced dramatic waves in its fertility level over the last three decades. The Swedish TFR dropped from almost 2.5 in the mid-1960s to about 1.7 around 1980 and then increased again to above the replacement level in 1990, after which it fell back to below 1.7 over the subsequent six years. In this paper, we describe the various birth-order components of these waves in some detail and relate them to correspondingly dramatic economic trends and to progressive family-policy reforms.

Introduction

Sweden is a sparsely populated Scandinavian country with almost nine million inhabitants. Perhaps more than in many other countries, priority has been given to ensuring a decent level of living for everyone rather than to providing a wide range of choices to those who can afford it. The welfare state has been the vehicle to achieve this. Family policy has been one of its cornerstones. Facilitation of work-force participation for women along with men, for parents of small children as well as for other adults, has been a guiding principle. Public campaigns aim at influencing people's attitudes and behaviour in the direction of an egalitarian and democratic social climate. Equal treatment of women and men is mandatory in all walks of life and is being pursued by programs of affirmative action. Gender equality on the job and at home has been promoted as an ideal. Many features aim at making it possible for dual-earner families with small children to cope with the pressures of combining labour-force participation and running a home. Inducements have taken the form of generous monetary benefits, comprehensive public child-care services, parental rights to reduction of working hours and job leave combined with the right to return to your job after such a leave, and extensive flexibility in exercising such rights.

As social life and public policies have developed, the working couple has become a main target group. Strong demands have arisen that society should support the family and should make sure that all children born are wanted and enjoy a decent standard of living. Family policy, social policy, labour-market policy, housing policy, and fiscal policy have all been used as instruments to improve the conditions of the family. Gender-equality policies have been given the same motivation in addition to the promotion of equity for women. Given the strong

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emphasis on universal labour-force participation, women's rights to a full life have been framed as the right of the working woman to experience motherhood rather than the right of mothers to hold a paid job.

A number of contributors have acted together in a dynamic that has produced progressively more ambitious goals. The Government, most political parties, scientists and publicists, trade unions, women's groups, and other interest groups have contributed to shape legislation and legal practice. Together, all these concerted influences have made a strong impact on people's mentality and people's expectations, without which one cannot understand recent trends in demographic behaviour.

Since the mid-1960s, it has become common for women in many European and Anglo-Saxon countries to combine childbearing with gainful employment. In Sweden, where this trend has been the strongest, over 80 per cent of women with pre-school children are in the labour force, though they often work part-time. The new pattern of women's labour-force participation is the result of a number of developments that have reinforced one another, such as the initial need for a bigger labour force, the power of persuasion of egalitarian groups, and the creation of new jobs and new professional occupations in health care, child care, personal services, and elsewhere as the welfare state has developed. The Swedish public sector has set an example to other employers in improving job opportunities for women and in making it easier for both partners in a couple to combine homemaking with paid employment. Successive reforms have sought to achieve the same situation for all workers irrespective of their employer.

In this paper we fill in this thumbnail sketch by means of a broad overview of the growth in the Swedish welfare system, in particular as regards public policies with consequences for family behaviour.¹⁾ We will see how such policies must have influenced demographic behaviour and how reforms in their turn have been enacted in response to changes in behaviour. To get closer to an explanation of dramatic developments in Sweden's fertility level, we sketch the evolution of family reforms in five broad periods, namely, (i) the pre-war years of economic depression, (ii) the post-war period of tranquillity up to the mid-1960s, (iii) the years of fertility decline between 1965 and the early 1980s, (iv) the decade of new fertility increase in the 1980s, and finally (v) the slump during the most recent half-decade. Along the way we will mention how women's labour-force participation has developed and indicate the important role of economic trends.

Overview of fertility trends

Figure 1 contains the annual Swedish total fertility rate (TFR) since the beginning of this century. The TFR started out at about four children per woman, but just as in most other European countries, it declined strongly until the mid-1930s. It reached a low point of 1.7 in 1935, which was among the lowest in the world at the time. Fertility increased over the

1) In developing our presentation, we have benefited from previous reviews by Sundström (1991), Bengtson and Näsman (1992), and Sundström and Stafford (1992). Oláh (1994) has highlighted gender aspects of Swedish family policies. Rønsen and Sundström (1996) have provided a comparison of family policies in Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

subsequent decade and kept undulating just above the replacement level until the mid-1960s. After the introduction of modern contraceptives,²⁾ the TFR declined strongly to a new low level just above 1.6, in line with similar developments in other countries (Figures 2A and 2B). During the second half of the 1980s, the pattern reversed in Sweden and our fertility level increased dramatically in an almost unique movement that attracted attention both at home and abroad. In 1990, the TFR reached 2.14, which was the highest level Sweden had had over the preceding quarter-century and just about the highest fertility level then in all of Western Europe.³⁾ At the same time, fertility had become very low in many other countries. France and Great Britain had TFR values of 1.8, Germany and Austria had about 1.5, and Italy, Spain, and Greece had TFRs around 1.4. Japan's TFR was 1.5. This pattern shattered many theories about what influences fertility, for Sweden is known as a country with unusually high labour-force participation among women, extensive nonmarital cohabitation (and cohabitants have lower fertility than married couples), and relatively high union-disruption rates (which is commonly believed to reduce rates of childbearing).

Figure 1. Total Fertility Rate for Sweden, 1990-1995

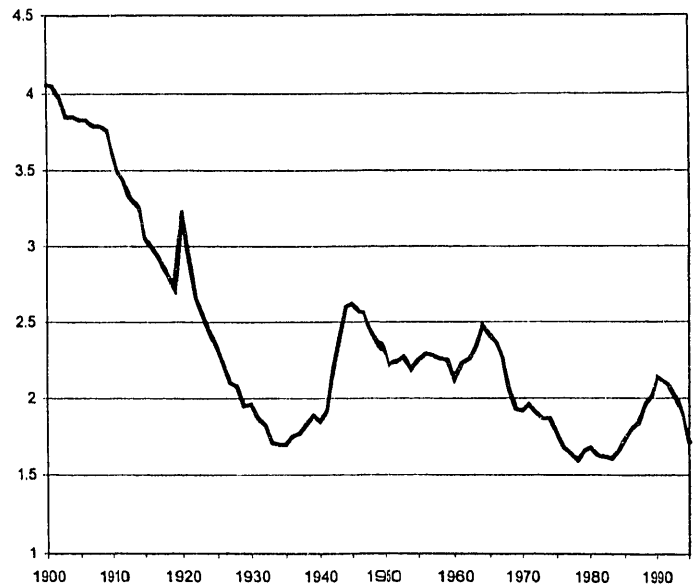


Figure 2A. Total Fertility Rate for France, Italy, Japan, Sweden, and West Germany

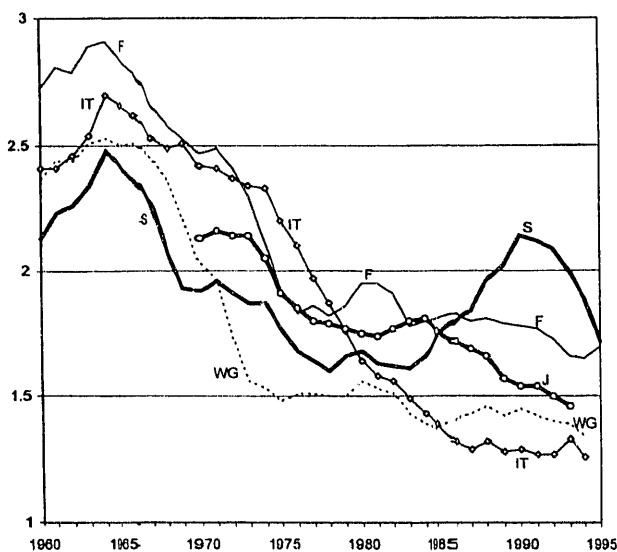
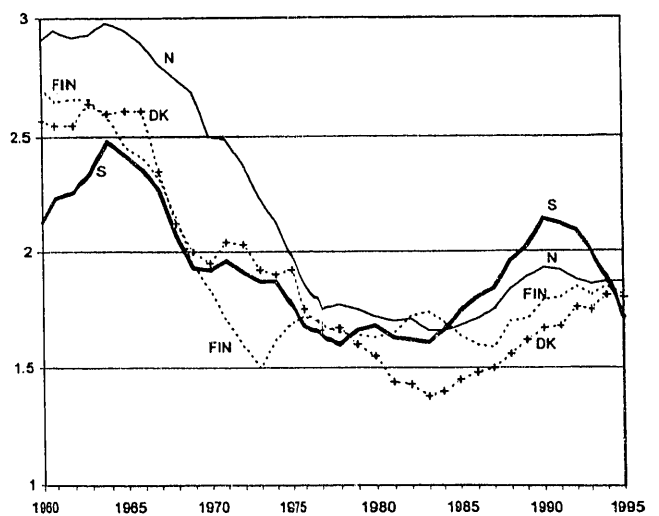


Figure 2B. Total Fertility Rate for Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden



2) The contraceptive pill was introduced in 1964 and the loop in 1967.

3) Only Ireland and Iceland had higher TFRs in 1990.

Immediately after 1990, Swedish fertility plummeted in another unique movement and reached the lowest level on record for this country after only five years. The current outlook for 1996 is a TFR somewhat below 1.6. No other Western country has had such a roller-coaster movement of fertility over the recent three decades (Figure 2).

To approach an understanding of how such movements came about, we need to describe the development of the Swedish welfare state, its policies, and their consequences in areas that influence childbearing behaviour. We have partitioned our account into segments corresponding to five periods, of which the first one deals with the low-level fertility of the 1930s.

The early start of the Swedish welfare system in the 1930s

During the economic depression of the 1930s, unemployment was high and fertility was very low. In Sweden as in many other countries there was a marked hostility to market work for married women. Some European countries even introduced legislation to prevent married women from working. Attitudes in Sweden became rather the reverse. In this country, some important steps were taken towards a family policy that aimed at improving the situation for women and at helping women combine work and family life.

To a large extent, such steps were inspired by Alva and Gunnar Myrdal's famous book on the population crisis, which appeared in 1935 (Myrdal and Myrdal, 1935). Their main contention was that the crisis should be remedied by government support to families with children. They insisted that increased fertility would result from protecting and improving the financial situation of families with children. They turned the old debate about married women's right to work into a fight for working women's right to marry and to have children. If women were dismissed from their jobs, the Myrdals argued, working women could not afford to marry and have children. They foresaw an increasing illegitimacy rate and more illegal abortions, and they predicted that couples who were dependent on two incomes for their maintenance would refrain from having children, particularly in the working class.

In the 1930s, Sweden introduced some family legislation uniquely early. The first maternity-leave regulations were introduced in 1931. In 1938, economic support for single mothers and a (very modest) maternity benefit was introduced for selected groups, and in 1939 it became illegal to dismiss a woman on the grounds of marriage or pregnancy.⁴⁾ Such regulations developed further step by step in the decades to come (see our Appendix Table).

The post-war period up to the mid-60s : the housewife parenthesis

In line with similar trends in many other countries, Swedish fertility started increasing again after the mid-1930s, in fact already before any of the ideas promoted by the Myrdals were put into practice to facilitate the combination of paid work and marriage and childbearing. In the mid-1940s, the TFR reached 2.6, up almost one whole child from the low point of 1.7 in 1935. The development towards gender equality in the roles of men and women largely came

4) This was true already in 1925 for most women who worked in the public sector.

to a halt as the great majority of married mothers became housewives instead of participating in the labour market. This period, which lasted for about two decades, has been called the "housewife parenthesis" (Axelsson, 1992). Even the Social Democrats, who had previously advocated women's right to a paid job, now gave priority to more traditional gender roles where the husband works full time and the wife caters to the family.

In line with its strongly egalitarian ideology, the Social-Democratic Administration promoted the replacement of particularistic and means-based social policies by universalistic solutions and made state support more of a civil right than ever before. In the 1940s, the general debate was concerned with whether the economic situation of families with children should be improved by means of special tax reductions (as advocated by the Conservatives and the Agrarian Party) or through universal benefits (favoured by Social Democrats and Liberals). The latter group won the day, and in 1948 tax-free child allowances were introduced with the same amount per child for all parents. It is notable that the money was paid to mothers, as a kind of wage for their work with the children, at a time when all other economic issues were normally regarded as a concern for men. In 1955, a universal maternity leave of three months was introduced (with a still quite modest, flat benefit). In 1963, the leave was extended to six paid months (Appendix Table A).

From 1965 to the early 1980s : fertility decline and growing public generosity

Women enter the labour force

In the mid-1960s, the risk of a labour shortage became a political issue in Sweden and elsewhere in Europe. While other countries chose to solve this problem by allowing temporary entry to "guest workers", Sweden did not accept such a system (Hammar, 1985). Foreigners seeking work were allowed to enter Sweden, in fact some major companies actively recruited labour abroad, but family immigration was permitted in Sweden before this was the rule in many other countries. Our immigrants were given monetary support to learn Swedish, the normal social-security and other benefits of the country were extended to them as a matter of course, and so on. This made social costs for immigrant labour high. At the same time there was a new awakening to the notion that women should be treated as equal partners in society and should be encouraged to take paid work on a par with men. With some simplification, one could say that a deliberate choice was made to facilitate the entry into the labour market of women in general, whether they had minor children or not. The educational system was expanded to enable young women to be better prepared for market work.⁵⁾ This included an expansion of adult education. Women were treated as a labour reserve that was encouraged to seek employment in private industry and in the quickly expanding public sector. The per cent of women engaged in market work rose from about 65 in 1970 to over 80 in 1980 at ages 25-54, and the rise continued to a level around 90 in 1990. There were similar increases at other ages (Figure 3A). There was a strong response even among women who had small children (Table 1, row 1).

5) Of course, men also benefited from the expansion in the educational system.

Figure 3. Economic-activity rate by age, 1970-1995

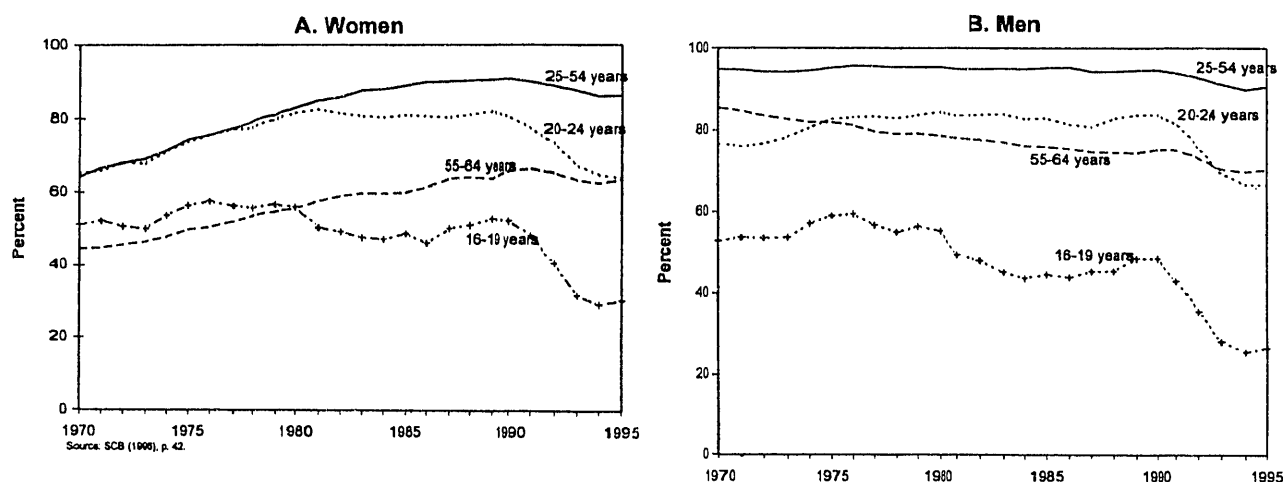


Table 1. Labour-force participation of Swedish parents with children at ages 0-6. Selected years, 1962-1995

	1962	1970	1981	1990	1995	1995
			Women			Men
In the labour force	34.2	49.7	79.0	86.3	79.3	93.0
Of these :						
At work	28.6	39.6	52.0	52.4	51.1	76.2
Absent from work	4.4	9.0	24.5	32.6	21.5	10.4
Unemployed	1.1	1.1	2.4	1.3	6.7	6.3
Not in the labour force	65.8	50.3	21.0	13.7	20.7	7.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source : Swedish labour-force surveys.

Changes in other areas

Once mothers started entering the labour market in large numbers, further change was called for in other areas. The family ideal of complementary roles for the spouses was questioned seriously in the public debate about gender roles. The mass media highlighted the perceived lack of real equity between women and men in the family as well as in the labour market. The advocacy of a change in women's roles was extended to a demand for a corresponding but converse change in men's roles. Public policy became progressively more concerned with measures that mainly favoured gender equality and the dual-earner family. Equity was seen as based on the independence of individual family members rather than on their mutual responsibility to each other. This was part of the motivation for a decisive modification of the taxation of married couples (1971), and it was reflected in legislation directed at the formation and dissolution of marriage (Agell, 1984, 1989).⁶⁾ Society's neutrality as regards the forms

6) Some reforms had great symbolic value: Female primogeniture in the royal succession was introduced in 1980. A new law about family names (1982) left it to the spouses to choose whether to adopt the man's family name, the wife's, or one each after they married. The previous standard was that both spouses used the husbands original family name except by special permission.

under which individual couples chose to live together was made explicit and led to a policy of non-interference when non-marital cohabitation became widespread in the late 1960s. It was followed by legislative adaptation to developments in union formation and union disruption (1987 etc.). We now turn to a description of some important features in this development.

Tax reform

As increasing numbers of Swedish women took more than elementary education and entered the labour force, there was a growing criticism of existing rules, which taxed spouses' incomes jointly. Without separate taxation, the high rates and strongly progressive structure of the Swedish tax system implied very low net earnings after tax for married women whose husbands were significant earners. A combination of separate taxation and progressive tax rates tends to favour joint participation in market work by husbands and wives. Individual taxation was seen as an issue of gender equality as well as a means to increase the labour force. After a few years with a mixed system, mandatory separate taxation was introduced in 1971.⁷⁾ As one could expect, these tax changes attracted married and cohabiting mothers to the labour market. They tended to go into part-time work more than into full-time work when their children were small, surely as a strategy to get a time budget they could cope with, and they were encouraged to do so by the tax-rate structure.

Family dynamics

Many changes of demographic behaviour accompanied the flow of women into the labour force. One of those changes was the rapid growth in consensual unions and the corresponding decline in marriage formation. Initially, many couples married in connection with the arrival of a first child, but it became more and more common to have children in nonmarital unions. Some ten per cent of all mothers were unmarried in the early 1960s. By the late 1980s, this had increased to about fifty per cent, and among first-time mothers about two-thirds were not married; instead living in a consensual union had become the norm. The mutual independence of the spouses was accentuated by a new law (effective in 1974) which simplified divorce proceedings and strengthened fathers' custody rights. The rights and duties of cohabitants were also made more similar to those of married people over the subsequent years.

Reduced natality was another feature. It became less and less common to have a third or higher-order child, and young men and women progressively postponed their first birth. The latter development led to a rise in the proportion that were still childless at age 25, say, from some forty per cent among women born in the 1940s to two-thirds of women born twenty years later, and to similar rises at other ages (Figure 4). Some of the increase in age at first birth may have been in response to the rules of the parental-benefit system, which we will describe next, but eventually people were having their first births so late on average that other considerations must have been more important. You do not have to wait until you are in your late twenties

7) In a transition period, separate taxation was combined with some tax reduction for families where one partner was a housewife. This feature disappeared after a few years and reappeared only briefly under a new guise as a "monetary child-care benefit" (the "vårdnadsbidrag") during the last few months of the non-socialist Administration in the early 1990s.

before you have your first child if all you want to achieve is a satisfactory education and job security in the job of your choice. This showed up when a majority of childless Swedes in their later twenties felt that entry into parenthood had lower priority for the moment than enjoying other aspects of life.⁸⁾ Almost everybody wanted children (and mostly two children at that; see B. Hoern, 1992) but they cannot have felt that postponing the start of childbearing was much of a problem.

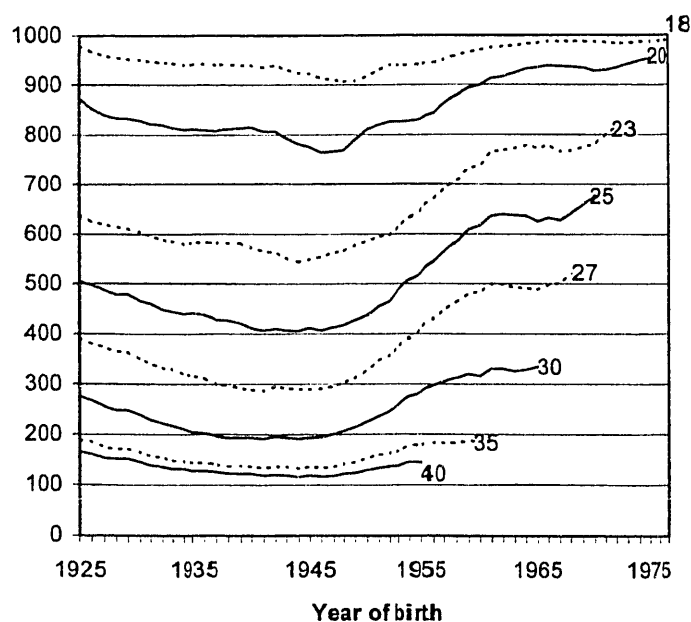
Conventional wisdom posited that the fertility decline was a consequence of women's heavy workload⁹⁾ and calls were frequent for greater engagement of fathers in household chores. Family legislation was reoriented and several inducements for fathers to change male roles were introduced.

The drop in births so concerned the authorities that they started wondering whether marked forces and public policies prevented Swedish couples from having the number of children that they wanted. To find out, they financed the first Swedish Family Survey (fielded in 1981) and took new initiatives in family and labour policies. We will sketch some of their reforms in what follows and will indicate some of the survey findings as we go along. Paradoxically, Swedish fertility had started rising again by the time the survey started its data collection and before the survey results were available.¹⁰⁾ In this respect, there is a striking similarity with the situation in the late 1930s.

Parental leave

An important sequence of reforms extended the maternal-leave system to facilitate the combination of paid employment and parenthood for mothers and to try to engage fathers in

Figure 4. Number childless at selected ages per1000 Swedish women born in 1925-1977



8) When childless respondents aged 25-29 in the Swedish Fertility Survey of 1981 who lived in a marital or consensual union and were sure they wanted children, were asked why they had not entered parenthood yet, the most common answer was that the respondent did not feel mature enough. Similarly, young male and female respondents in a Youth Survey in 1985 were more interested in getting ahead in their jobs and in earning money to buy what they wanted or develop their leisure-time activities than in starting a family and having children. (See B. Hoern, 1992). The stability of such responses was confirmed in the second Swedish Family Survey in 1992 (B. Hoern, 1995, Vol. 3, Table 10).

9) Below, we will challenge the view that this can have been an important explanation.

10) Natality for second and higher order births started rising after 1977. For first births, natality never really declined much at ages above thirty and it started increasing for younger ages after a low point in 1984. See J. Hoern (1993).

similar behaviour. Before 1974, only mothers were entitled to absence from work in connection with the arrival of a child. They had a guaranteed right to return to their jobs but the income compensation during a leave was quite modest. In 1974, the income-replacement level was raised to all of 90 per cent of earnings and fathers became entitled to share the parental leave with mothers in any manner that the couple might want. At the same time, benefits were made taxable and started generating pension rights. There were six months of leave for the parents to share in 1974. In 1975 this was extended to seven months, in 1978 to nine months (of which one month was at very low pay that was not income-related), in 1980 to twelve months (of which three months were at the low flat rate), and finally to fifteen months in 1989 (while the rule that three of these months are at the low flat rate were retained). In addition, parents are entitled to unpaid leave (with continued job security) after the paid parental leave has been used up, until the child is eighteen months old.¹¹⁾

The parental-leave remuneration is based on the earnings recorded over the eight months just before a birth.¹²⁾ The leave can be taken out with full job security if the parent has worked with the same employer either for a minimum of six months before delivery or at least twelve of the last twenty-four months just before the birth.

Since 1978, a parent in Sweden has had an additional statutory right to reduce his or her working hours to 75 per cent of full time (with a correspondingly reduced salary) until the child is well into primary school.¹³⁾ The parent also has the right to go back to full time work if he or she gives the employer three months' notice, and they get full social benefits relative to the income earned. A prerequisite for reduced working hours is that the parent has been in full-time employment with the employer for at least six months before the reduction.

The system allows parents much flexibility. Since 1975, parental leave can be taken out at full time or part time at the parents' option, and it can be saved and used any time before the child is eight years old.¹⁴⁾ Parental-leave usage stops when the parent falls ill. Parents are allowed to mix vacation, sickness periods, flat-rate and income-related leave benefits (or no such benefits), and full- and part-time parental leave with great liberality. This allows them to follow an individual strategy that they see as optimal to themselves. Note how the per cent of women who were absent from work jumped between 1970 and 1981 in Table 1.

In addition to the main benefits just described for the care of very young children, the Swedish parental-insurance system has included the following three additional benefits at the same level of income replacement: (i) Since 1974, parents can take out paid leave to care for their child or children during occasional periods of sickness.¹⁵⁾ (ii) Fathers exclusively can take out ten "daddy days" of leave when a child is born (since 1980). (iii) Parents can take out up to two "contact days" of paid leave per year and per child aged four to twelve to participate in day care or school activities (since 1986).

11) Selected (but quite large) groups negotiated additional leave and additional monetary benefits on parental leave in their wage settlements.

12) Mothers with no such recorded earnings receive only the very low flat rate.

13) In Sweden, primary school is entered at age 7.

14) This upper age limit has varied somewhat over the years.

15) They have a similar right if the person who normally takes care of the child or children is ill.

In addition, the sickness-insurance system contains a special benefit for pregnant women who cannot continue to work due to health problems caused by the pregnancy (since 1980).

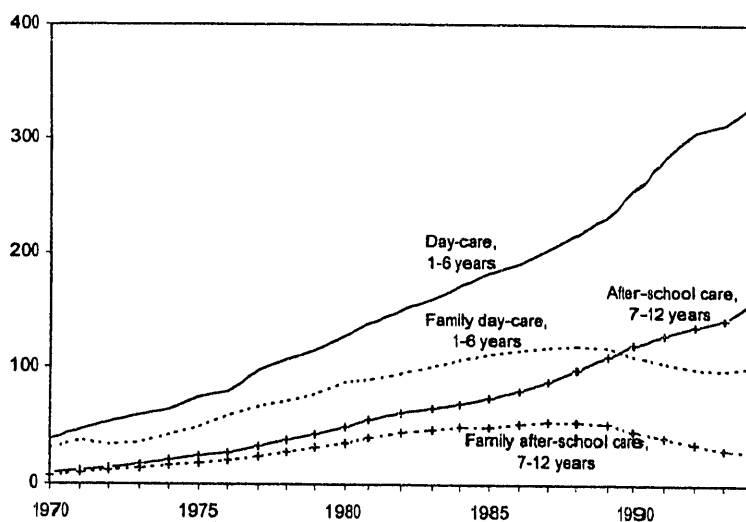
All benefits are paid by the social-security system and not by the employer. They are financed through general taxes (including a hefty payroll tax) and there is no direct cost to the employer of the parent who uses benefits.

Child care

Raising small children is of course not merely a question of parental leave and leave benefits but also of making satisfactory arrangements in subsequent years. During the 1970s and 1980s, Sweden made sizeable investments in child-care personnel and public day-care facilities, including high-quality day-care centres, family day care, part-time pre-school and after-school arrangements for six-year-olds and young school children of parents who work or are enrolled in education. The number of places in public day care increased dramatically (Figure 5).

Day-care services are provided by local authorities, who get extensive government subsidies. Parents' fees cover only a fraction of the running costs, which are currently some 70 000 SEK per child per year.¹⁶⁾ Co-operatives and other privately organised systems exist but are insignificant.

Figure 5. Children in day-care and after-school care, 1970-1993. Thousands



Source: SCB (1996), p. 35.

The 1980s : times were good, policies generous, and fertility increased

The new fertility increase

As we have mentioned already, the Swedish total fertility rate rose appreciably after the beginning of the 1980s (Figure 1). Fertility for births of orders 2 and above actually started increasing after 1977 (J. Hoem, 1993), though this was not known at the time. The postponement of first births at normal childbearing ages continued until 1984, but then first-birth rates started rising even at young ages and stayed on the upward track throughout the second half of the 1980s;¹⁷⁾ at ages above 30, first-birth rates essentially have increased at least since the 1960s (Andersson, 1996).

16) This corresponds to about US \$ 11000 at the current rate of exchange (1996). In general, parental fees increase with income. Most local authorities let the fee per child decrease as the number of siblings who use child care increases.

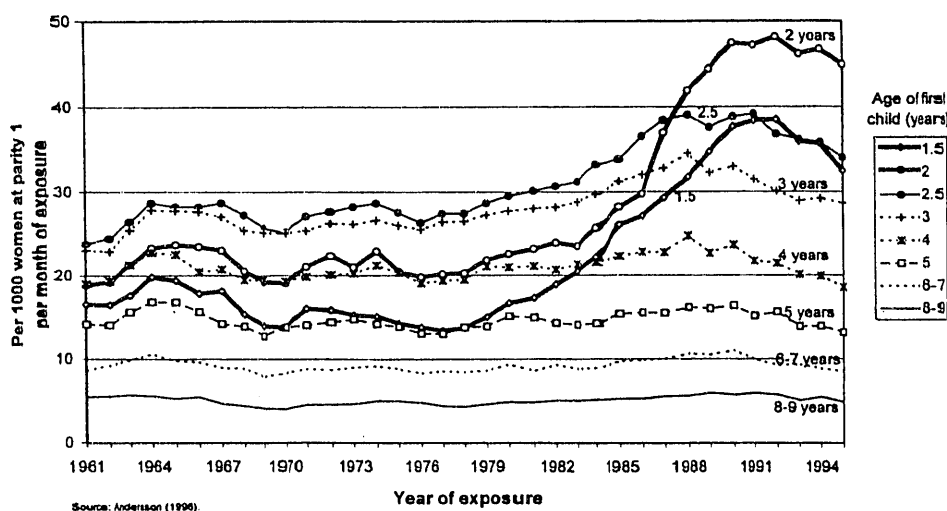
17) This can be seen in Figure 4 as a flat part just before the right-hand tail of the curves.

The speed premium on the next birth

In public family-insurance systems where benefits are related to earnings, parents are induced to time their births so as to optimise their total income stream. If benefits must be earned by periods of recorded income, there is an inducement to postpone entry into parenthood until rights to suitable benefits have been established.

In such systems, there is also a corresponding inducement to space subsequent children in a manner that avoids penalising the recipient in consequence of a low income during the interval between births. The Swedish system differs from all others known to us in that it contains an element which acts as a strong encouragement to space births closely after the first one. In this country, the benefit level after child number two, three, and so on is the same as after the preceding child if the previous benefit level was above what the parent has gained during the interval between the two latest births, provided that this interval does not exceed a prescribed number of months. This rule was made statutory in 1980 and the "eligibility interval" was then set to 24 months. In 1986, the interval was extended to thirty months. Such an interval turns out to be an attainable target for many parents, and the rule has made many couples speed up their pace of childbearing appreciably once their first child has arrived (Figure 6; J. Hoem, 1990, 1993; Andersson, 1996; Olah, 1996).¹⁸⁾ By 1990, rates of third- and fourth-order births had risen to the levels they had when the original fertility decline started in the early 1960s, and rates of second births in 1990 were much above those of, say, 1961. Only rates of first birth to women below age 30 were below previous levels.

Figure 6. Second-birth rates by age of first child, 1961-1995, standardized for age of mother at first birth



18) In Figure 6, the age of the first child is given as 1.5 when the child is 18 through 23 months old. Age 2 corresponds to the child's 24th through 29th month of life. Age 2.5 means that the child is 30 through 35 months old. Ages 3 and upwards have their normal meaning.

Note how the curve for age 1.5 rises from about 1980 and how the curve for age 2 shoots upward after 1986 while the curve for age 2.5 does not. We interpret features like these as direct consequences of the introduction of the rule about the speed premium in 1980 and the extension of the eligibility interval in 1986.

We will return below to the general rise and subsequent decline in all curves in Figure 6.

1990-1996 : fertility drops again

When we moved into the 1990s, economic trends turned sour in Sweden. As the recession deepened, unemployment rose from very little to normal European levels. The public sector, previously a bastion of employment for women, suffered a strong and progressive reduction. For the first time in modern Swedish history, family policies have become less generous. Costs were cut in child care and schools and average group and class sizes have risen.¹⁹⁾ In 1995, the compensation level of parental-leave benefits was reduced from 90 to 80 per cent of recorded earnings²⁰⁾ and in 1996 to 75 per cent.²¹⁾ Cash child allowances have been cut back.²²⁾ An additional allowance for each child after the second one, introduced in 1982 and increased in later years, has disappeared for children born in 1996 or later. Two days set aside for parental contact with school or day care, introduced in 1986, were also abolished in 1996. As a group, families with small children have felt the pinch from all sides. A slimmed public sector means increasing unemployment among women. Unemployment means loss of income and loss of income-related benefits during parental leave. Less generous day-care services means greater stress on children, and so on. In line with this, fertility has plummeted between 1990 and 1996 to an extent unknown in other countries (Figure 2).

This precipitous drop in fertility has taken place at normal childbearing ages and for most birth orders.²³⁾ Third- and fourth-order birth rates fell by as much as one-third between 1990 and 1995. There is a similar decline for first-birth rates at ages below 30, which shows up as a renewed increase in childlessness in the right-hand tail of most curves in Figure 4.²⁴⁾ Second-birth rates have been partly spared and have only suffered mild set-backs. We will soon suggest how these developments can be understood in the light of economic trends and legislative reforms, but we first want to discuss how far Sweden has gone towards the attainment of gender equality.

Limitations in the attainment of gender-equality

Sweden may be a world leader in many aspects of gender equality, but despite all the commitment, the country still has some way to go before this principle has been incorporated into the everyday activities of a majority of adult Swedes. Discrepancies between ideals and reality show up in many connections, as in the following two illustrations.

19) The average size of a group of children aged 1 to 6 (a "class") in Swedish day-care centres went up from 13.8 in 1990 to 16.5 in 1994. The corresponding size of an after-school group of children aged 7 to 12 increased by five children over the same four years (up from 17.8 in 1990 to 22.8 in 1994). Source: Statistics Sweden, 1996, p. 35.

20) It remained at 90 per cent during the month reserved for each parent in 1995.

21) The benefit is 85 per cent in the reserved month in 1996.

22) The allowance was reduced from SEK 750 (ca. US\$ 115) per child per month in 1995 to SEK 640 (ca. US\$ 100) in 1996.

23) See Andersson, 1996, for documentation of the following description.

24) At higher ages, first-birth rates have continued to rise.

(i) Figure 3 shows how dissimilar women's and men's trends in economic activity are. Figure 7 tells the same story in a longitudinal perspective.²⁵⁾ It shows how distinct gender differences arise when the first child is born. Note how strongly women's lives are affected by their family situation, how they are full-time housewives²⁶⁾ for a while after the first child has arrived, and how they share their time between part-time and full-time work when they return to their jobs. Also note how different the lives of men in the same cohort are at the same ages. Their activity patterns are dominated by only three activities, namely studies, military service, and full-time employment. A man's pattern changes when he becomes a parent too, but in contrast to a woman's pattern, his becomes less varied.

(ii) Sweden has had modest success in making fathers take out time for parental leave. This shows up in official statistics (SCB, 1996, p. 36) and is illuminated in the results from the Family Survey of 1992. For

about every fourth child born during the period 1985-90, its father was said to have taken out at least one month of parental leave. The proportion of fathers for whom such behaviour was reported, increased with the level of education of the mother as well as that of the father, taken separately. When we include the educational attainment of both parents simultaneously in the

Figure 7. Women's and men's activity patterns

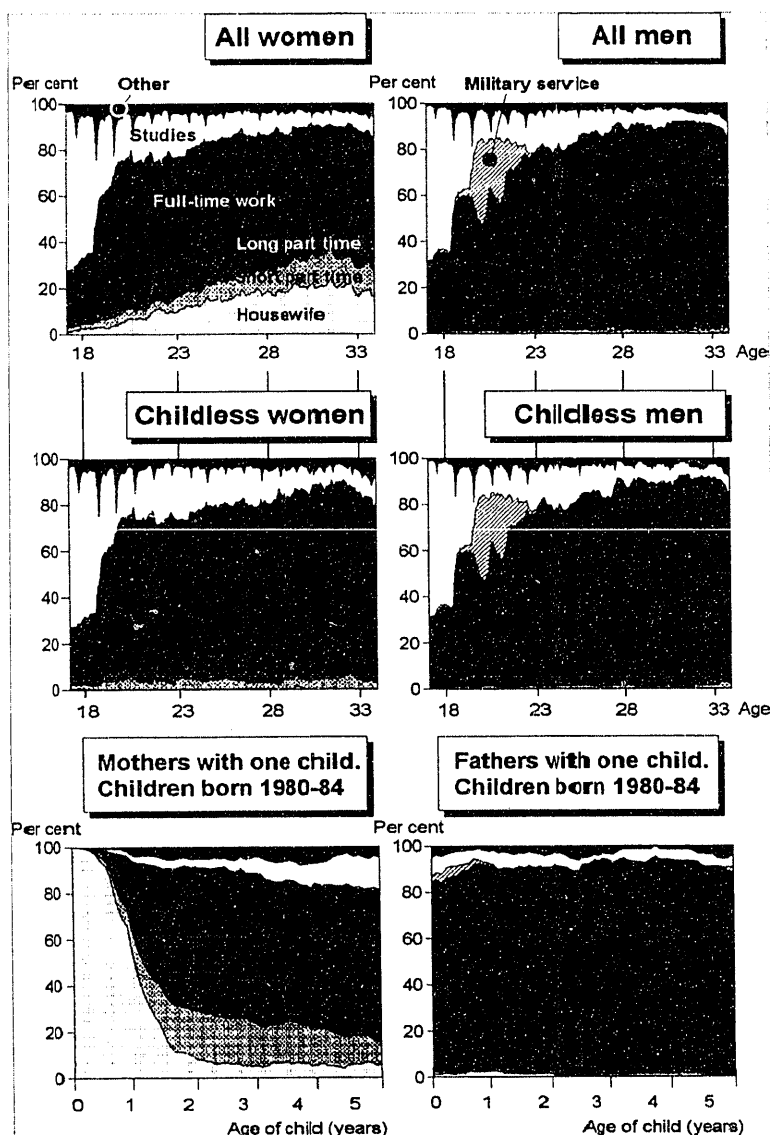


Figure 7. Women's and men's activity patterns.

First panel: All women and men born in 1959, at ages 17-34.
 Second panel: Childless women and men born in 1959, at ages 17-34.
 Third panel: All mothers and fathers of firstborn children born in 1980-1984, by age of child.

Source: B. Hoem (1996), Figure 9.

25) Figure 7 is based on individual life histories collected from respondents in the second Swedish Family Survey, conducted in 1992. This particular figure is based on data for male and female respondents born in 1959, but other cohorts behaved in a similar fashion.

26) Traditional housewives and women on parental leave are grouped together as housewives in Figure 7.

analysis, it turns out that the mother's educational level is the dominating factor. The effect of the father's attainment disappears almost entirely when we control for the mother's educational attainment (B. Hoem, 1995, Vol. 2, pp. 48-49).²⁷⁾

How can we understand this? Is it possible that women need to be given stronger motives to allow fathers to participate in parental leave-taking? Is it possible that it is not enough to exhort fathers to take parental leave, as most opinion leaders seem to have thought?

Committed authorities felt that this kind of record was so dismal that since 1995 one of the twelve months of statutory income-related leave has been reserved for the father.²⁸⁾ The purpose is to induce men to take out more than an insignificant amount of time for parental leave rather than to leave it all to the mother. All such regulations are symmetric for men and women in Sweden, so another month is reserved for the mother, but this has little practical importance because mothers have continued to take out most months of leave in any case.²⁹⁾ In principle, the ten non-reserved months of income-related leave (and also the subsequent months with little or no monetary benefit) can be shared between the parent as they wish, but the ideology of gender equality has not been turned into practice at this point, not even in Sweden.

Interpretations

Much more research needs to be carried out before we can give more than tentative explanations of the roller-coaster movements that Sweden has experienced in its fertility over the last three decades. Nevertheless, we venture the following interpretations of the known facts.

1965-1980

At least three features acted together to precipitate the great flow of women into the Swedish labour force that started in the mid-1960s. (i) Women's organisations were clamouring for greater equity between men and women and were attaining more political influence. (ii) The need for more labour and the high social cost of immigrant labour lead to policies that facilitated entry for women. (iii) The arrival of modern contraceptives induced a new feeling of control over the reproductive process. Together with a steady progression of policy reforms this control made the combination of family life and market work feasible for most couples, even when they had young children in their care.

People have often believed that increased labour-force participation of women was a prime explanation of the fertility decline, but the evidence now available makes such an explanation implausible. It does not fit with the great fertility increase in Sweden in the 1980s, which

27) Including both parents' educational levels in the analysis is important because there is such a strong correlation between the parents' levels of education. This can only be done for children whose parents lived together at interview. Otherwise, we only know the educational career of the (male or female) responding parent and not that of his or her spouse.

28) The stipulation is that a reserved month is lost and unavailable to the mother if a father does not use the month of leave reserved for him.

29) To make the policy more palatable to parents, the parental-leave benefit was set to 90 per cent of earnings during the reserved month for each parent. It was cut to 80 per cent in the other months.

occurred at a time when more women than ever held a job and when they worked longer hours than they ever used to, nor does it fit with the observation that women are much less attached to the labour force in countries where fertility is low today (Japan, the Netherlands, Mediterranean Europe, and so on) than where it is high. Even more devastating to the theory of women's working roles as a major cause of fertility decline is the fact that we cannot find any substantial evidence of it in individual-level data for women who have entered motherhood, which is where you would look.³⁰⁾ In our own investigation of childbearing behaviour in Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s (B. Hoem, 1993), women who had two children or who had worked in a paid job just about all the time since first birth essentially had the same fertility as those who had been housewives during the same stage in life.³¹⁾ This was true irrespective of whether the work was carried out largely full-time or part-time. Our analysis was based on individual life histories. The negative association between labour-force participation and (final) sibling size often found in studies that have not used such data, most probably is a consequence of a strong effect in the opposite direction, for the number of children a woman has and their age composition have been important determinants of her labour-force behaviour.

It is more probable that the fertility decline during the transitional period in the 1960s and 1970s was caused by attitudinal changes that followed in the wake of the realisation that a woman could control her childbearing by means of contraception backed up by abortion. The problems of combining market work and rearing children were brought into focus, and responsible parenthood was stressed more than ever before. This was not a period when people lightly started childbearing at a young age or when established families easily lightly exceeded the prevailing two-child norm. Childbearing was temporarily postponed or curtailed.

The 1980s

To understand the substantial fertility increase that Sweden experienced in the 1980s, it is important to note that the increase included all birth orders and women of all ages. Three features may have interacted to produce such a result.

First, after some youth unemployment during the initial years of the 1980s had been reduced, economic trends were very favourable and private incomes improved rapidly in Sweden throughout the rest of the 1980s. The income effect on fertility must have been strong.

Secondly, the quite massive investments directed towards families with children must have borne fruit. This is our explanation of the general increase in all curves in Figure 6 and of similar features in diagrams for higher-order births. The introduction of the speed premium on births after the first one definitely lead to an increased pace of childbearing after entry into motherhood, but this is only part of the story. Fertility rose both for women who did and women who did not benefit from this particular policy element.

Thirdly, there was a strong belief in the general population that things could only continue to improve, for everybody in general and for families with children in particular. Great optimism was reflected in the political campaigns for the parliamentary election of 1988, for

30) In modern Sweden, women regularly have had a job (or in times of unemployment have sought a job) from the completion of their education and up to the arrival of the first child.

31) Similar findings have been made later for other countries (Kravdal, 1992).

instance, in which much attention was given to family policy. The Social Democrats wanted to extend the period of paid parental leave to 18 months. This would also facilitate the organisation of child care for all children whose parents asked for it, a goal which the Social Democrats had made part of their platform. Non-socialist parties wanted to introduce a general monetary home-care allowance (the so-called *vårdnads-bidrag*) for the first three years of a child's life. Parents were to be allowed to use the money as they saw fit. They could buy child care if they wanted to, or they could use it as an extra income compensation if one of the parents decided to stay home for a longer period than the paid parental leave. The Social Democrats won the election and extended the parental leave to 15 months (1989). They were unable to finance an extension to 18 months directly, but the fifteen-month solution was regarded as a temporary compromise. The 1991 election was won by the non-socialist opposition, whose Administration introduced a taxable home-care allowance of SEK 2000 per month for each child between the ages of one and three, inclusive, who did not use public day care.³²⁾

Such colourful detail is included here to illuminate the spirit of the times and the signals sent by opinion leaders. The general public cannot have been immune to such signals. To be assured that responsible authorities were concerned about the situation of families with children and were exceeding each other in wooing the electorate with what sounded like realistic promises must have contributed to giving would-be parents confidence in the feasibility of first-time or further parenthood. The ideological impact of the expressed purpose of family policies must have added to the content of the reforms themselves in softening the effect of changes that could otherwise have reduced fertility levels much more strongly than what we saw in Sweden up to the late 1970s and also reinforced policy impacts in the 1980s.

The 1990s

The precipitous drop in fertility since 1990 is likely to have a set of explanations that are similar to the ones we just gave, but in reverse. First, the economic present has become quite problematic for many families. Unemployment has hit hard, particularly at young ages³³⁾ and for people employed in the public sector,³⁴⁾ and those who have not experienced unemployment in their own family may fear that it may reach themselves before long. Because benefit rates are so strongly tied to earned income in Sweden, and because such benefits perhaps are more

32) It took a while before this provision took force, and after six months it was abolished by the new Social Democratic government that had won the subsequent election. Tempers ran hot in the public debate for and against the *vårdnadsbidrag*. In hindsight, one may wonder whether generous appropriations of this kind might not have counteracted some of the fertility decline in the 1990s. A home-care allowance exists in Finland (Rønsen and Sundström, 1996) and it may be part of the explanation why that country has had a much less turbulent fertility than Sweden (Figure 2B) despite similar economic problems.

33) Look at the right-hand tails of the curves for ages 16-19 and 20-24 in Figures 3A and B. Some of those trends reflect a strong increase in enrolment in upper-secondary school (the *gymnasium*) and in higher education, but that increase in itself may essentially be a consequence of the difficulty that young people have in obtaining jobs. It also reinforces the fertility decline, for students almost invariably have a lower natality than those who have a regular income when everything else is equal.

34) As we have indicated before, the great majority of jobs for women have been in the public sector.

important than in other countries, one should expect a strong recession with public-sector cut-backs to have a stronger income effect than elsewhere. This may be how we should interpret the national differences that we have observed (Figure 2). At a time of slackening incomes and pessimistic expectations it may be rational to postpone a first birth (if you are not too old) and possibly forego a higher-order birth. Together, such features could produce the age-and-parity-specific patterns we have described.³⁵⁾

Secondly, the cutbacks in family-policy generosity must have begun to take their toll towards the mid-1990s. Most such reductions are quite recent (Appendix Table B), and even after they have taken effect, Sweden retains a benefit level that is generous by international standards. In fact, this may have served as a bulwark against further declines in second-birth rates at normal intervals after first birth (Figure 6).³⁶⁾ Nevertheless, prospective parents must have a feeling of relative deprivation when they compare what support they are likely to receive with what they could have expected just a little time before. The suddenness of recent upheavals is likely to have caused a kind of a shock, and fertility may have taken a temporary blow while people adapt to new conditions.

Thirdly, the signals emitted when the public sector is being cut back and blood is let even from the previously sacred cow of family policies must have produced subdued expectations, and thus decreased fertility, in a population that is used to taking its cues from its democratic authorities. More than in many other Western nations, Swedes have an entrenched habit of trusting that a benevolent State will take all initiative in the social sphere.³⁷⁾ One also gets the impression that the Swedish press is more ready to proclaim disaster than the media in our neighbouring countries, and the public mood cannot avoid being influenced.

Most families who now are in line for having children, have mothers who themselves have held a job for most of their adult lives, and who often have been employed in the public sector. Little remains of whatever incompatibility in attitudes to family and labour-force behaviour may have existed among generations active in the 1970s. Both the old and the young generation have been hit by the novel developments. No wonder if mere talk of public cut-backs, not to mention their reality, has an ominous ring that inspires prudent expectations about the future, and cautious behaviour in the present.

35) On this background, what is surprising and in need of explanation is why Sweden's neighbouring countries Denmark and Finland have not had a similar drop in fertility lately (Figure 2B) when they have been subject to similar economic misfortunes. (The Norwegian economy does not have the same dramatic problems.)

36) It may also have prevented third- and fourth-birth rates from dropping even more than what has been observed between 1990 and 1995. We would expect rates of third- and fourth-order births to be more sensitive than second-order birth rates to economic stress in families with small children, for in a country with a two-child norm as strong as in Sweden, third and particularly fourth births must be regarded as more expendable than second births. One may speculate that a drop by the one-third seen in third-birth rates may be less than what they could have been if births had not been bolstered by current benefit levels.

37) Our overview goes back all the way to the 1930s to indicate the long prehistory of this attitude.

Table 2. Plans of future childbearing among childless women and men

	Number of persons	Children in the future? (per cent)					Total
		Yes	Perhaps	Probably not	Absolutely not	No* answ.	
Women							
1969 (23years)	455	93	6	1	0	0	100
1964 (28years)	214	83	11	4	1	1	100
1959 (33years)	102	50	28	11	6	5	100
1954 (38years)	62	8	19	45	23	5	100
1949 (43years)	60	8	10	20	48	13	100
Men							
1964 (28years)	309	81	13	3	1	2	100
1959 (33years)	87	55	25	14	3	1	100
1949 (43years)	93	10	27	36	19	9	100

*The group with no recorded answer also includes respondents who were not asked this question, usually because they said they were too old to have children.

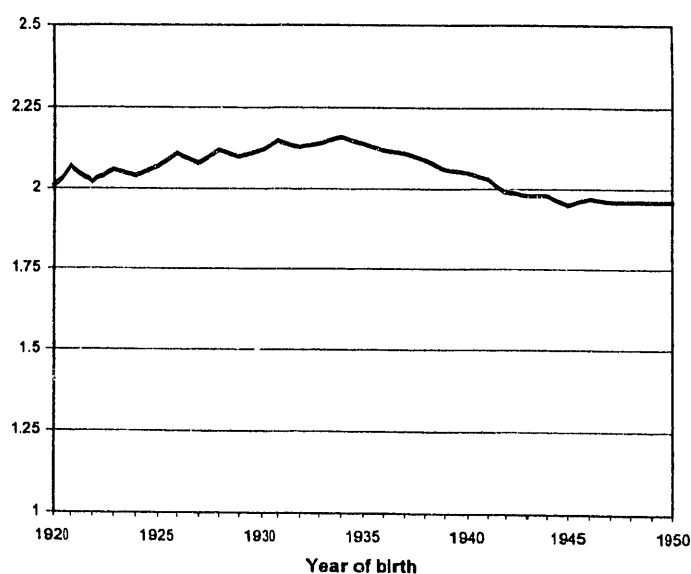
Source: B. Hoem (1995), Vol. 3, Table 8.

Prospects for the future

There is no firm sign that Swedish women (or men) are prepared to give up parenthood or that they prefer to have a single child in order to let women devote themselves to their job careers. The findings of the Swedish Family Survey of 1992 contradict any such notion. Among its telling results is one which shows that even at age 33, half of the women who were childless expected to become mothers some time and another 28 per cent thought they perhaps might become mothers (Table 2). A plot of the Total Fertility Rate for the cohorts born between 1920 and 1950 (Figure 8) also shows that Swedish women have had about two children on average for a long while, despite the great variability seen in the period-based TFR (Figure 1). This notable fact demonstrates that most of the fertility variation on record concerns the age at which children are born, i.e., the tempo of childbearing, not the quantum. We suggest that values concerning how many children people want have probably been quite stable over the cohorts involved, but that there have been great swings in the general mood in society, swings that determine the manner in which family values are realised in childbearing behaviour at any time. These swings move in concert with economic and political conditions.

As is evident again from Figure 4, first births have been delayed radically over the last

Figure 8. Completed family size for Swedish cohorts born in 1920-1950



twenty-five years. Given that fertility declines with increasing age for every birth order (at least for ages above the late twenties), one may wonder whether the final sibship size can remain at its current level for the cohorts who are now coming of age when one knows that every third woman at age 30 was childless in 1995. Perhaps future politicians may have new cause to ask whether market forces and public policies prevent Swedish couples from having the number of children that they want.

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Appendix Table. Family-policy reforms in Sweden

A. 1931-1978

Year	Primary parental leave	Other reforms
1931	Some (unpaid) maternity leave, benefit for some groups	
...		
1938	Some maternity benefit for all mothers	Economic support for single mothers
1939		Dismissal on pregnancy, delivery or marriage forbidden
...		
1948		Universal child allowance
...		
1955	Universal maternity leave; low benefit for 3 months	
...		
1963	6 months; rather low benefit tied to earnings	
1964		The pill
...		
1967		The loop
...		
1971		Separate taxation of spouses becomes mandatory
1972		
1973		
1974	Paid paternity leave introduced as an optional partial alternative to maternity leave; benefit level raised to 90% of earnings ²⁾	Divorce law further liberalised ¹⁾
1975	7 months paid at 90% ³⁾	
1976		Free abortion; new law on sterillisation
1977		Longer leave when children are sick.
1978	8 months paid at 90% + 1 month at low flat rate	

1) Also ten days of paid leave to tend to sick children.

2) Parental benefits can be shared between the parents as they wish; benefits are made taxable and also used to generate pension rights.

3) Since 1975, benefits can be used part-time and saved for use any time before the child reaches age 8. (The upper age limit has varied somewhat over time.)

Appendix Table (continued). Family-policy reforms in Sweden

B. 1979-1996

1979		Parents get right to part time work-week (75%) ⁴⁾
1980	9 months paid at 90% + 3 months at flat rate	Statutory speed premium on next child if within 24 months; + two months of paid leave to attend to sick children ⁵⁾
1981		
1982		Extra child allowances for three or more children ⁶⁾
...		
1986		Speed premium period extended to 30 months ⁷⁾
1987		
1988		
1989	12 months paid at 90% + 3 months at a flat rate	3 months for sick children
1990		4 months for sick children
...		
1995	Benefit for 12 months reduced to 80%	One of the 12 months reserved for the father and one for the mother; ⁸⁾
1996	Benefit for 12 months further reduced to 75% of prior earnings	Monetary child allowance reduced to SEK 640 per month; extra child allowance for third etc. children abolished for children born in 1996 or later

4) Also new rules about child support on divorce.

5) Also introduction of 10 "daddy days" to be taken by fathers at the time of a birth; and of 50 days of paid leave for sickness during pregnancy.

6) A basic child allowance is paid each month for each of the first two children. For a third child, an extra 25 per cent of the basic allowance was added. For any fourth or fifth child, the additional allowance was 50 per cent of the basic allowance. These percentages were used in 1982-88. In 1989-90, the additions were 50 per cent for a third child, 190 per cent for a fourth child, 240 per cent for a fifth child, and 160 per cent for each of any sixth or higher-order child. Starting in 1991, the additions were 50 per cent for a third child, 100 per cent for a fourth child, and 150 per cent for each of any fifth or higher-order child. The basic child allowance had reached SEK 560 per month per child in 1990. In 1991-95 it was SEK 750 (US \$ 115). The benefit is paid through the child's 18th year and even longer for school pupils (Sundström, 1991).

7) Introduction of two "contact days" of paid leave per year for contacts with school or day-care centre. Limitations on paternal benefits according to the mother's income level are abolished.

8) The two contact days per year per child are removed.