



The families of the future - recent trends in family demography applied on Sweden's population forecast

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Background

There are no forecasts on household or family level in Sweden, mostly due to lack of data. The last census was conducted in 1990, and since then there are gaps in the register-based statistics on families and households. The first register-based census, covering 2011, is in production and Statistics Sweden will publish yearly statistics on households and families from now on. It will take another few years until there will be enough available data to complement the population forecast with a forecast on households.

Approach of the study

To still get an idea of how the families of the future will look like we have tried a different approach. By recycling the knowledge of recent analyses on family formation, separations and other changes in family structure performed at Statistics Sweden and using it in a new way we can take the results of these studies to a higher level. In this study we apply the knowledge of these analyzes and the observed trends from the latest available statistics on the results of the population forecast to achieve new knowledge of the families of the future.

Knowledge and statistics

The aging population is a demographic change occurring in most countries, to a higher or lower extent. In Sweden the fertility is on a relatively high level, comparing to other European countries, which mitigates the effect, but the population increase during the next decades will mostly occur among the older population. In Statistics Sweden's latest population forecast the number of older people will increase with almost 40 percent between 2012 and 2035, while the population under 65 is expected to increase with less than 10 percent during the same time period. The more rapid decline in mortality among men than among women will lead to men being in the majority in the population in a few years. The age where women become the majority is increasing from around 65 in 2012 to 75 in 2035. Sweden is also a country with a large immigration surplus. In the population forecast we expect the high levels of immigration Sweden is experiencing today to continue for approximately five years and then decline slightly. The emigration however is expected to increase slowly but steady, which will lead to a declining immigration surplus. The proportion foreign born will increase from today's 15 percent to around 18 percent of the population by year 2020 and then stabilize. The larger population of foreign born in Sweden will also lead to a larger population with one or two foreign born parents. (Statistics Sweden, 2013c)



We have also observed an increasing level of education in the population. And women tend to have a higher level of education than men. Among women in childbearing ages a majority have a post-secondary education while a majority of the men in the same age group have a secondary education (Statistics Sweden, 2013d). Another observation is that the population is concentrating more and more to the larger cities. This is especially true regarding children and people in reproductive ages. Around 1990 Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmoe and their suburbs constituted around 30 percent of the population in Sweden and the same share of the total number of births. In 2012 the proportion of the total population living in these areas had increased to almost 35 percent and 40 percent of the children born during the year were born here (Statistics Sweden, 2013e). The age at leaving home has increased during the last years, especially in the larger cities (Statistics Sweden, 2008). One explanation could be the increasing prices of housing in the cities.

Fathers are becoming more involved in family life. One example of this is that the fathers' share of parental leave is increasing and was 24 percent in 2011. In Sweden 480 days of parental leave benefits per child is divided between both parents. The regulations have changed over time in order to encourage men to take a larger share of the parental leave. Now 60 days are reserved for the mother and father respectively and the rest may be transferred to the other parent. There is also an equality bonus, which is paid to parents who both take more than 60 days of parental leave (Social Insurance Agency, 2012).

Close to one third of all children experience their parents separating during their childhood. Among these children most live with their mother, but an increasing share of the children are living with their father. The proportion children living at a close distance to their other parent is increasing, which indicates that the children have more contact with the parent they do not live with. Alternate living, that the child lives equal amount of time with each parent, is also becoming more common. Recent surveys show that one third of the children with separated parents alternate between their parents. In the early 1990's only a few percent chose this type of living arrangement (Statistics Sweden, 2009a).

In recent years Statistics Sweden has published several reports analyzing family formation and separations. One report focuses on comparisons between persons with Swedish and foreign background. These studies show for example that people tend to form couples with someone who is similar to themselves. The age difference in a couple is usually a few years at the most and in about two thirds of the couples who had their first child in 2000 both partners had the same level of education (Statistics Sweden, 2012). People are also more likely to form families with someone with the same background. Those born in Sweden with both parents born abroad are less likely to form a family than other Swedish-born persons (Statistics Sweden, 2010). Finding a partner might be more difficult for this group than for those with at least one Swedish-born parent. The findings regarding separations show that couples with different background are more likely to separate than couples with the same background and couples with higher education are less likely to separate than couples with a lower level of education (Statistics Sweden, 2012, 2013a). In couples with different levels of education there is a larger risk of separation if the woman has a higher level of education than the man (Statistics Sweden, 2012).

Conclusion

In the next 20 years we expect changes in the population, with a larger surplus of men and a larger share of foreign born persons and persons with parents born abroad, and we have observed a higher proportion with a post-secondary education among women. Since many seem prone to choosing a partner with similar characteristics as themselves, this diversification of the population could lead to difficulties finding a partner. There is no evidence of people becoming less interested in finding a partner and forming a family (Statistics Sweden, 2009b) and therefore many will have to start searching for a partner in a wider circle than before.

Regarding the development of separations we can observe two conflicting trends. The higher proportion with a higher level of education indicates that relationships will become more stable in the future. At the same time we predict a larger number of couples with different backgrounds, with different level of education and with a larger age difference. These changes would instead lead to an increased number of separations.

Among the children experiencing their parents separating, we expect the trend toward parents sharing the responsibility to continue. This will lead to a larger proportion of the children living an equal amount of time with both parents after a separation and a larger number of children living with their father. The concentration of families to the larger cities in Sweden is likely to further enhance the development towards parents living relatively close to one another even after a separation. When both parents have a continuing responsibility for the children after a separation, women and men will probably have more equal conditions for finding a new partner.

The increasing age at leaving the parental home combined with a higher age at birth today than around 20 years ago could lead to parents having children living at home almost up until retirement age, even though retirement age is likely to increase. After the children leave a couple is still expected to have many years together as healthy seniors. The continuing decline in mortality, and the decreasing difference between women's and men's life expectancy will push the age when women become widows to higher ages and we can therefore expect a decline in the proportion of elderly persons living alone.

Sources

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