

Trend Reversal in Marriage in Sweden

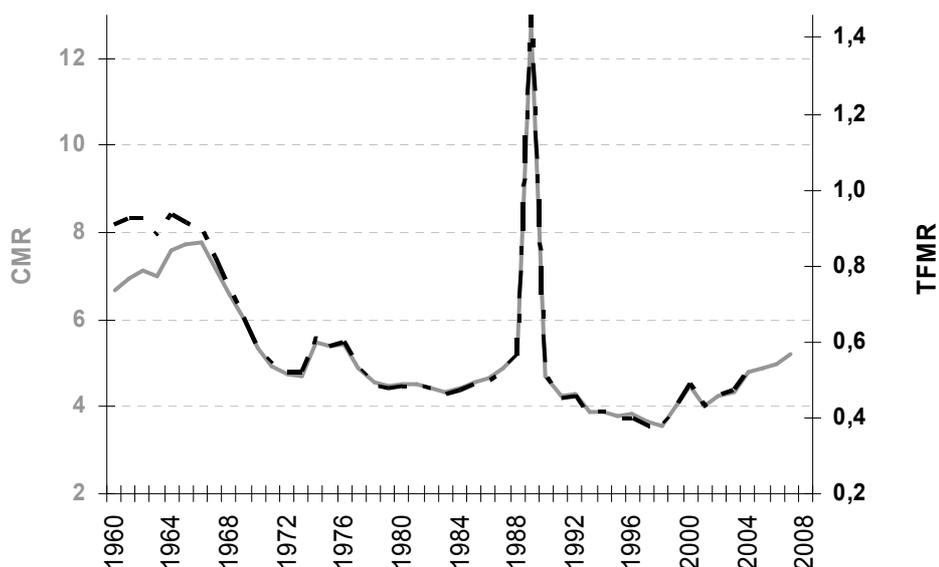
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Sweden has seen a reversal in marriage trends, from mainly declining marriage rates since the late 1960's to increasing rates from 1998 and onwards, a new trend in Sweden that has not yet been closely studied. The aim of this study is to investigate whether the recent reversal in marriage trends in Sweden can be related to observed increasing childbearing trends or other compositional changes in the population, either demographic or socio-economic. This study addresses the questions of whether the development in marriage can be seen as a real trend reversal and how marriage and childbearing are interrelated in a country that is seen as a forerunner in family demographic development (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe, 2004; van de Kaa, 2002) and where marriage and childbearing are largely seen as only loosely related life-events (for a discussion see e.g. Baizan *et.al.*, 2004).

Marriage formation in Sweden

From the late 1960's and during the three following decades Sweden has experienced declining marriage rates, except for peaks in the mid-1970's and in 1989, that are supposedly due to legislation change (for discussion see Agell, 1985; Hoem, 1991; Statistics Sweden, 1999). The declining marriage rates, parallel with increasing rates of unmarried cohabitation and childbearing out of wedlock, are generally seen as parts of a second demographic transition in the Western world, where marriage and family as institutions have been weakened (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe, 2004; van de Kaa, 2002). However, since 1998 both the Crude Marriage Rates and Total Female First Marriage Rates have been increasing in Sweden, as can be seen from Figure 1.

Figure 1. Crude Marriage Rates (CMR) in Sweden 1960-2007 and Total Female First Marriage Rates (TFMR) for women below age 50 in Sweden 1960-2004.



Sources: CMR from Statistics Sweden (2008), and TFMR from Council of Europe (2006).

These marriage rates are however very crude proxies for actual patterns of marriage behavior. They cannot reveal if there has been a real behavioral change regarding marriage formation or

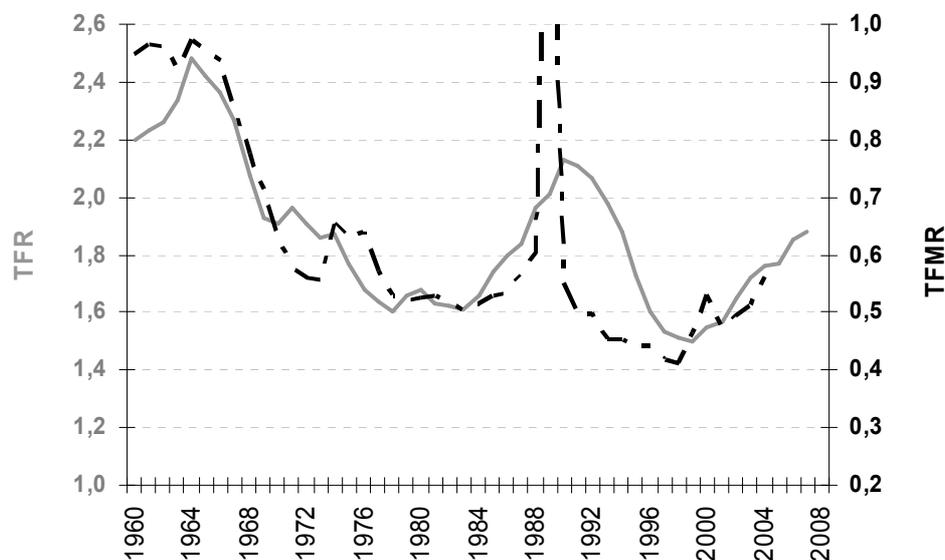
if the trend reversal is due to compositional change, in other words if an underlying cause of the increasing marriage rates is that there are larger shares in the population belonging to demographic or socio-economic groups that generally are more prone to marry.

Marriage propensities have shown to vary across a number of individual characteristics, both demographic and socio-economic that might have become more common in the population. Bracher and Santow (1998) have for example shown that certain socio-economic characteristics are related to marriage propensities in Sweden. Men and women are more likely to marry if they have necessary resources and traits such as a high degree of education, are economically independent and have a solid attachment to the labor-market. To investigate whether the reversal in marriage might be due to shifts in the share of people belonging to different demographic and socio-economic categories, this study uses longitudinal individual data and more advanced analytical techniques.

The relationship between marriage and childbearing

It is interesting to note that also the birth rates have been increasing in Sweden since 1999, in parallel with the marriages, and that the marriage and fertility trends at the aggregate level seem to have followed each other quite closely in the latest decades, as can be seen from Figure 2.

Figure 2. Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in Sweden 1960-2007 and Total Female First Marriage Rates (TFMR) for women below age 50 in Sweden 1960-2004.



Source: Council of Europe (2006).

One question that arises from this is if the recent marriage reversal could be related to the increasing fertility rates. It has been commonly argued that in today's Sweden, childbearing and marriage are two very loosely related life events because cohabitation is an accepted alternative to marriage and there are no strong normative or institutional incentives to marry, even when having children (for a discussion see e.g. Baizan *et.al.*, 2004). However, marriage continues to be quite popular in Sweden and it is linked to childbearing (Andersson, 1998, 2004). This study investigates whether the parallel trends of marriage and fertility at the aggregate level are reflected in increasing marriage propensities being related to childbearing behavior at the individual level.

Data and methods

To investigate whether the reversal in marriage formation is due to increasing childbearing trends or other compositional changes in the population this study investigates marriage propensities for women in Sweden during 1993-2003. This period comprises the five years before, respectively after, 1998, when the trend turned from declining to increasing rates. Only first marriages to women are studied as these largely represent the general marriage trends (cfr. Figure 1 and Andersson, 2004).

The study uses register data derived from a database at Statistics Sweden with information from different administrative registers. The data contain information on all residents in Sweden, all marriages registered during the studied period, as well as a large amount of socio-economic and demographic characteristics and other life events. Factors included in the study are except for marital status; calendar year, age, parity, age of youngest child, country of birth, educational attainment, income, labour-market attachment and region of residence. These factors are likely related to marriage propensities at the same time as they might have shifted in the population. The data is at the individual level and longitudinal.

To maximally utilize the available demographic and socio-economic data, event-history techniques are applied. This statistical method is highly relevant when studying life-course data, as it takes the time that a person is under risk into proper account. An individual's propensity, or risk, to marry is modeled as a function of his or her individual characteristics. The marriage propensities are presented by calendar year and month and controlled for the demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The procedure allows us to detect the timing in the trend reversal and to control for the role of compositional change, including change related to childbearing. If for example the reversal would be completely smoothed out when controlling for parity and age of youngest child, this would mean that the increasing marriage trends at the aggregate level are completely related to the fertility increase.

The interaction effects between calendar year and the other independent variables are also studied to reveal whether the relationships between covariates and marriage propensities have changed over time. If marriage propensities have increased more strongly for some groups than for others, it is possible to trace how marriage trends possibly are related to true behavioral change.

To further study the interrelationship between marriage and childbearing some descriptive analyses are conducted on the timing of marriage in relation to childbearing. For example the share of people who have children in a certain time period before and after marrying, and vice versa, is analyzed.

Expected results and implications of the study

The results are expected to show that even when controlling for compositional change across socio-economic and demographic characteristics in the population, there has been a reversal in marriage trends in Sweden. There is a new pattern in Sweden that does not conform to that of continually declining marriage rates, as generally depicted in demographic theory. Furthermore the study will presumably show that the increasing marriage trend is related to increasing childbearing and that marriage and childbearing are still quite closely linked to each other as there are higher propensities of marrying within a few years interval before and after childbirth. Results might also show that marriage and childbearing are related to the same demographic and socio-economic individual characteristics. These results bring new

light to the debate about the relationship between marriage and fertility in Sweden and other countries at advanced stages of the second demographic transition.

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