

Abstract

The increase in lone parent families during recent decades is an important feature of the change of the Western family. Sweden is no exception in this sense, since the mid 60's the proportion of lone parent families has increased from less than ten to over twenty percent of all families with children. Although the proportion of lone fathers has increased, a majority of lone parents are women. The most common way of entering lone motherhood is through divorce or separation. Lone parent families are on average more likely to experience economic hardship than are couple families with children, mainly because they have only one income to rely on. An additional reason why lone parent families are of interest for social policy are the possible adverse effects of growing up in a lone parent family.

Most of the information about lone parent families originates from cross-sectional surveys which thus describes the situations at points in time. However, such information cannot be used to answer several questions. The answers to these questions requires analyses that take into consideration flows into and out of lone parenthood. This thesis does so using demographic, economic and employment histories from the 1992/93 Swedish Family Survey. This is the first time such an analysis is performed on Swedish data. The empirical analysis is carried out using hazard rate models which permit the estimation of the effects of various covariates on the hazard of entering and exiting lone motherhood. Economic variables are analyzed to disentangle the effect they exert on womens' propensity to enter lone motherhood through separation or pre-union birth and on lone mothers' propensity to start living with a new partner.

The results indicate that women in better economic conditions (those with higher earnings, higher education and more work experience) are less likely to enter lone motherhood through union disruption. We also find that women who work more before entering a union have a higher risk of separation and thus entry into lone motherhood while the opposite is true for women that work more during motherhood. Although these result contradicts hypotheses in economic models, we argue that there are aspects that make such a result plausible in the Swedish context. Separately analyzing the entry into lone motherhood through pre-union birth we find also that women who are in a better economic situation are less likely to enter lone motherhood, while those searching for a job have a higher risk of entering the state. Analyzing the expected duration of lone motherhood, we find that women in better economic situations have a longer duration of lone motherhood and are thus less likely to exit the state. The average expected duration of lone motherhood was, for separated mothers, three years and for never married or cohabiting mothers two and a half years.