



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

# Acceptans eller utstötning?

Ogifta mödrar i Ångermanland 1860–1940

Robert Eckeryd

## Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för  
avläggande av filosofie doktorexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i  
Hörsal E, Humnisthuset,

fredagen den 21 april, kl. 10:15.

Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på svenska.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor emerita, Marie Clark Nelson,  
Institutionen för studier av samhällsutveckling och kultur (ISAK),  
Linköpings universitet.

**Organization**

Umeå University  
Department of Historical,  
Philosophical and  
Religious studies

**Document type**

Doctoral thesis

**Date of publication**

31 March 2017

**Author**

Robert Eckeryd

**Title**

Acceptans eller utstötning? Ogifta mödrar i Ångermanland 1860-1940  
(Acceptance or Exclusion? Unmarried Mothers in Ångermanland 1860–1940)

**Abstract**

This dissertation has investigated the *social vulnerability* of unmarried mothers in three rural court districts in the province of Ångermanland in northern Sweden during the period 1860–1940. The main focus is on the consequences that the birth of one or more illegitimate children had on the women's lives as regards to how they were treated in the local community, including by both neighbours and formal institutions. It was pre-supposed that the social vulnerability of unmarried mothers can vary considerably between geographically close areas and that such variations are likely linked to the frequency of illegitimate births, which in turn should be dependent on unrelated variables such as diverging socio-economic structures and the importance of Christianity. Two periods have been chosen for in-depth analysis: the 1860s and a number of years before and after 1918, when the first specific law regarding illegitimate children was put into practice. This enables both a comparison of areas with diverging illegitimate fertility rates and a comparison of the unmarried mothers' social vulnerability in a community still largely based on farming in the 19th century, with that of a more industrialised and modernised society in the early 20th century. Theories of social stigma and the concept of deviancy have been applied for the purposes of interpretation. Social vulnerability has been assumed to be linked to perceptions regarding how deviant the unmarried mothers were considered to be in the local community. To investigate this Church records have been used for life course analyses covering the women's fertile ages, with a primary focus on the unmarried mothers' marriage patterns. Court protocols have also been studied for an analysis of how paternity suits were handled by district courts, as regards what evidence was required for different outcomes and what that can tell us about the women's social vulnerability. Based on the frequency of illegitimate births, two main hypotheses were formulated: first, that the unmarried mothers were least socially vulnerable in one particular area during both periods, and secondly that they during the 1860s were most vulnerable in a court district with an unusually low rate of illegitimate births. The first main hypothesis was confirmed regarding the 1860s. The second main hypothesis was however disproven by several factors. In the early 20th century, modernisation and the growing working class seem to have eased attitudes towards unmarried mothers in the two court districts with the lowest illegitimate fertility frequencies, leading to a similar social vulnerability in all three areas. However an illegitimate birth could still be seen as deviant behavior and women who had been abandoned with two illegitimate children seems to have been stigmatised in all areas during both periods of investigation.

**Keywords**

Women's History, illegitimacy, life course, microdemography, judicial history, gender, Sweden

**Language**

Swedish  
English Summary

**ISBN**

978-91-7601-685-5

**Number of pages**

416