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The effect of socioeconomic status on marital fertility during the demographic transition, northern Sweden 1821–1950¹

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Abstract

The impact of the family's socioeconomic status at marriage on later child births during the demographic transition (1821–1950) is studied. It is found that the fertility decline starts in the upper classes in the decades prior to 1900. The farmers are characterized by relatively high fertility in high ages even in the end of the study period.

A stopping behavior seems to dominate a spacing one, especially along cohorts. The effect of declining infant mortality over time is minor.

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1 Introduction

The impact of the family's socioeconomic status at marriage on later child births during the demographic transition (1821–1950) is studied. Special attention is paid to whether the transition to a low fertility regime is uniform over socioeconomic class, and if not, in which order did the transition take place. The study area consists of two regions in northern Sweden, Skellefteå and Umeå.

2 Background

This research question is not new. Mason (1997) discussed contemporary explanation models of the fertility transition and argued that there cannot be one explanation alone. More recent studies of Swedish circumstances were given by Dribe and Scalone (2014) and Bengtsson and Dribe (2014). One perhaps convincing theory is that the fertility decline was a necessary result of the mortality decline. For a detailed and initiated overview of the research field, see the aforementioned papers and also two thoughtful papers by Ní Bhrolcháin (1992, 2011).

3 The study area

Our data cover the time period 1821–1950, see Figure 8, and the geographical area defined by the Skellefteå and Umeå towns with surrounding rural parishes. Where in Europe? See map in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 about here.]

Where in Sweden? See map in Figure 2.

[Figure 2 about here.]

A detailed map of the parishes is found in Figure 3. The Skellefteå region was one big parish in the eighteenth century. It successively split up in smaller parishes, and Figure 3 shows the status in the year 1915. In our data, *Fällfors* is part of *Byske*, and *Lövånger* and *Burträsk* are not present at all.

[Figure 3 about here.]

The development of population size in the two regions are shown in Figure 4.

[Figure 4 about here.]

3.1 Skellefteå

At the outset of the study the region consisted of one large rural parish, Skellefteå. By 1900 three new parishes had been detached into separate units, but their populations are still included in the study. The region was large, both in terms of area and of population. With an area of about 1700 square miles, Skellefteå was considerably larger than most rural parishes in Sweden. It was considered a one-day journey to travel from the northern to the southern border, and a ride from the coast to the more remote and sparsely populated parts of the

parish in the west could take even longer, especially in wintertime. The main part of the population was, however, concentrated in the coastal area and in river valleys. In the early 19th century the population size was around 6900, and it increased rapidly during the first half of the century. By 1850 it had reached to about 17 000 and at the turn of the century it had further doubled. Despite the large increase in population, which was mainly the result of a high natural growth, the population density on the whole remained low (Alm Stenflo, 1994).

Skellefteå was during the studied period a rural area with a mixed economy, based on animal husbandry, forestry and sidelines such as tar and saltpeter production. By the mid-19th century export of tar and lumber became an increasingly important part of the economy. The majority of the farmers in the region were smallholders and there were no large estates. Some small sawmills were established early in the century, but before 1900, industrialization had little impact on the local economy. In 1835, approximately 85 percent of the population made their living from farming. Although the distribution of economic resources was more uniform than in several other Swedish regions, the social stratification became more pronounced throughout the 19th century. The increasing proletarianization was mainly a consequence of rapid population growth. The number of farming households remained fairly stable, while the number of landless households increased. The socio-economic development was also influenced by two devastating subsistence crises in the region, in the 1830s and in the 1860s (Engberg, 2005).

Infant mortality was comparatively low. Fertility was high, not only by Swedish standards, but also in European comparison and there are no indications of family planning. Total fertility fluctuated around five children per woman and, although fertility did decline during the nineteenth century, the actual fertility transition occurred late in the district (Alm Stenflo, 1994; Coale and Watkins, 1986). The rate of illegitimacy was low in comparison with many other parts of Northern Sweden, where frequent pre-nuptial conceptions and illegitimate births were common. The illegitimacy rate fluctuated between three and six per cent during the nineteenth century (Alm Stenflo, 1994).

3.2 Umeå

The Umeå region is one of the newest in the collection of regions digitized at the Demographic Data Base, Umeå University. The covered time period is shorter than the one for the Skellefteå region in that registration starts around January 1, 1901.

Umeå is older and substantially larger than Skellefteå as a town: The birth year of the town Umeå is generally recognized as 1622. Umeå became early a center for administration and education, but Umeå University is not a fact before 1963. Early in the twentieth century, two military regiments were placed in Umeå, and they remained there during the first half of the century. The population size as defined in our data sets was 19 000 on January 1, 1900, 33 000 on January 1, 1950 and 104 000 when the end of the century.

The surrounding rural area is similar in demography and economy to the corresponding parts of the Skellefteå region.

4 Models

The statistical modeling is conveniently done in the framework of counting (birth) processes, but there are still choices to contemplate: Choice of time scale, and how to handle the

dynamic aspects of the counting process. In most of the earlier attempts to investigate changes in *stopping* and *spacing* behavior over time, models for *birth intervals* have been employed (Bengtsson and Dribe, 2006; Dribe and Scalone, 2014; Bengtsson and Dribe, 2014; Bras, 2014), but in my opinion this approach is too indirect. Instead I argue for the *counting process* approach, where each married woman contributes an age interval (or a union of such intervals), starting at age of marriage or age 20, whichever comes *last*, and ends with the dissolution of marriage or age 50, whichever comes *first*. We also allow intervals to start and end with migration events. In the so defined interval, birth time (age) points are recorded.

An obvious alternative for studying marital fertility is to start the clock at the *date of marriage*, but it complicates things in some ways, one being that it will be difficult (but not impossible) to apply the Coale-Trussell model (Coale and Trussell, 1978). Therefore, in the following, the basic time scale is *age*.

4.1 Fertility as a counting process

We define

$$\{N_i(t), m_i \leq t \leq 50\}, \quad i \in \text{mother's ID}$$

as the *number of births before and including age t and after marriage at age m_i* for woman No. i . By age we mean *exact age*, measured by a precision of a day, but with *time unit year*. Thus $\{N_i, i = 1, 2, \dots\}$ are *counting processes* with jumps of size one (except for multiple births) at the age of the mother at deliveries. As an example, see Figure 5 for the marital fertility history of mother No. 233: She married at age 25, died at age 46, and in between she had seven births. See Aalen et al. (2008) for details on the counting process theory.

[Figure 5 about here.]

$N(t)$ is a *right-continuous* function, meaning essentially that at jump points, the value is the larger of the two possible values. $N(t-)$ denotes its *left-continuous* counterpart, that is, it is defined as the number of births up to but *not including* age t .

4.2 The Coale-Trussell (CT) model

We will assume a piecewise constant hazard model on the age span 20–50, with jumps every fifth year. We apply the restriction proposed by Coale (1971) and Coale and Trussell (1978):

$$\lambda(t) = Mn(t)e^{mv(t)}, \quad 20 \leq t < 50,$$

where the piecewise constant functions n, v are given in Table 1.

t	20–25	25–30	30–35	35–40	40–45	45–50
n(t)	0.460	0.431	0.395	0.322	0.167	0.024
v(t)	0.000	-0.279	-0.667	-1.042	-1.414	-1.671

Table 1: The constants in the Coale-Trussell (CT) model.

The parameter m governs the form of the (cumulative) hazard function, while M measures level. Figure 6 shows two cases, $(m, M) = (0, 1)$ and $(m, M) = (1, 1.57)$. These two cases

generate the same expected number of births over a full reproductive period (20–50), that is, the same *Total Marital Fertility Rate* (TMFR). The first is an example of *spacing*, but no *stopping*, while the second is a case of stopping (and eventually spacing).

[Figure 6 about here.]

The parameter M measures level, but note that keeping M fixed and increasing m *lowers* the TMFR.

How realistic is the CT model? We compare its fits for two populations, one with an m close to zero, and one with m close to one, and we compare it to a piecewise constant hazard (PCH) model with the same interval partitioning as in the CT but with freely varying levels. See Figure 7.

[Figure 7 about here.]

The fit seems to be satisfactory, even if a formal test would reject the CT model in favor of the PCH.

5 Data

Data come from The Demographic Data Base, Centre for Demographic and Ageing Research (CEDAR) at Umeå University, Sweden, and cover the Skellefteå region, situated in the north of Sweden (Westberg et al., 2016), and the Umeå region, situated 100 km south of Skellefteå. All women, ever married and born between 1 January 1801 and 31 December 1935, are included in the data set and followed throughout their fertility period, but not after December 31, 1950. For each woman, the exact timing of her deliveries (if any) after the onset of the first marriage and after age 20 are recorded.

Figure 8 shows the sampling frame. The parallelogram is the basis for *cohort* analysis, and the rectangle correspondingly for *period* analysis.

[Figure 8 about here.]

Central covariates are family HISCLASS, mother’s age at marriage, and mother’s birth-date. The rows corresponding to woman No. 233 in our data file are (with selected columns) shown in Table 2.

id	lopnr	parish	hisclass	birthdate	enter	exit	event	inf.death
233	1	Norsjö	3	1834.384	24.715	25.232	TRUE	FALSE
233	2	Norsjö	3	1834.384	25.232	26.557	TRUE	FALSE
233	3	Norsjö	3	1834.384	26.557	28.720	TRUE	FALSE
233	4	Norsjö	3	1834.384	28.720	30.582	TRUE	FALSE
233	5	Norsjö	3	1834.384	30.582	32.980	TRUE	FALSE
233	6	Norsjö	3	1834.384	32.980	36.014	TRUE	FALSE
233	7	Norsjö	3	1834.384	36.014	38.962	TRUE	FALSE
233	8	Norsjö	3	1834.384	38.962	46.468	FALSE	FALSE

Table 2: Birth history of woman No. 233 (selected columns).

Woman No. 233 got married at age 24 (years), was followed until age 46.468 when she died, and she had seven births. The last interval (almost) always ends with no birth (**event** = **FALSE**): Women are followed until age 50, end of marriage, or lost to follow-up, whichever comes first. The first interval starts at age at marriage, or age at first observation as married, or age 20 and married, whichever comes *last*. Note that childless marriages are included.

Figure 9 shows the distribution (per cent) over socioeconomic status and time periods of exposure time for married women in the sample. The socioeconomic status is measured by the occupation of the head of the household (a man). The big shift is that the fraction farmers is more than halved during this century. All the other classes are increasing in size.

[Figure 9 about here.]

5.1 Variables

The following variables are of primary interest in our analysis.

region Birth region, Skellefteå or Umeå.

urban TRUE if birth in one of the towns Skellefteå and Umeå, otherwise FALSE.

parish one of Umeå (town), Umeå lands (rural, Skellefteå (town), Skellefteå lands (rural), Byske, Bureå, Norsjö, Jörn, and Malå.

birthdate A real number indicating mother's birth date.

ch.birthdate The birth date of the child.

deathdate The death date of the child.

enter Mother's age at previous child, marriage, first seen, or age 20.

exit mother's age at birth of current child or date last seen or age 50.

event Indicator of a birth at **exit**.

event1 Indicator of a birth at **exit** that survives age one.

lopnr Birth order among *observed* births between ages 20 and 50.

antrec Total number of records for current woman.

hisclass Hisclass with the following categories.

elite The cream of the society.

middle The middle class.

farmer Farmers, by far the largest group. Decreases in relative size over time.

skilled Skilled workers.

lower skilled Not so skilled workers.

unskilled Unskilled workers.

socBranch Four branch categories, **official**, **farming**, **business**, and **worker**. Much overlap with **hisclass**.

cohort Birth cohort of mother.

period Calendar time period.

marAge Age at marriage.

age Mother's age at child birth grouped in five-year-intervals.

exposure Interval length.

ind.death Did the born child die before age one?

N Constants from the Coale-Trussell model.

V Constants from the Coale-Trussell model.

Now, since all or interesting covariates are, or can be transformed into, categorical variables, *aggregating* the variables **exposure**, **event**, and **event1** over all possible combinations of values of the other covariates creates three multidimensional tables that can be stored in a compact way as seen in Tables 3 and 4.

	period	cohort	marAge	hisclass	parish	region	urban
1	1821-1850	1821-1840	(15,25]	elite	Skellefteå.land	ske	FALSE
2	1821-1850	1821-1840	(15,25]	elite	Skellefteå.land	ske	FALSE
3	1821-1850	1821-1840	(15,25]	elite	Skellefteå.land	ske	FALSE
4	1821-1850	1821-1840	(15,25]	elite	Skellefteå.land	ske	FALSE
5	1821-1850	1821-1840	(15,25]	elite	Skellefteå.land	ske	FALSE
6	1821-1850	1821-1840	(15,25]	elite	Skellefteå.land	ske	FALSE

Table 3: First rows in compact multiway table. Columns representing explanatory variables.

	age	event	event1	exposure	N	V
1	20-24	13	11	31.117	0.460	0.000
2	25-29	27	23	63.703	0.431	-0.279
3	30-34	8	7	42.341	0.395	-0.667
4	35-39	3	3	17.191	0.322	-1.042
5	40-44	0	0	8.672	0.167	-1.414
6	45-49	0	0	2.968	0.024	-1.671

Table 4: First rows in compact multiway table. Columns representing response and model (CT) constants.

In Figure 10 is shown how the *age-period-cohort* plane is split up for each combination of the levels of the explanatory variables.

[Figure 10 about here.]

There are 225 792 unique combinations of the levels of the explanatory variables and the age-period-cohort combinations, but many of them are either structural or random zeros, so the total number of observed combinations is only 6 228. The original data frame contains 300 579 records.

Thus, the analyses of our problem gain hugely in speed by using the aggregated tables, and further, it makes it very easy to implement the Coale-Trussell model. The worries are: Are we losing information? Will our results be biased?

The answers to these questions are: Given that the model we are fitting, and given the original data, the tables we create form *sufficient statistics*. This means that, given our tables, the extra information in the original data is pure noise. It will *not* improve our results.

That is the good news. The back side is that the "pure noise" can be used to judge model fit. If an analysis shows that it is *not* pure noise, but perhaps is related to a (subset of) our data, then we are in trouble. So, the advice is: perform all the estimations and testing in the tabular world, and evaluate model fit with the original data. It saves a huge amount of time compared to doing everything with the original sample.

In our specific case, with the piecewise constant hazards model, we can utilize the fact that the likelihood function that is given by a survival analysis is exactly the same as if we interpret the number of births in each of our cells as following a *Poisson* distribution and write down the resulting likelihood function. But note carefully that this does *not* imply that the numbers of births really follow a Poisson distribution (they do not). Thus, we can utilize ordinary software for Poisson regression and get very efficient and fast parameter estimation. The (small) price we have to pay is that for instance estimates of the baseline hazard function are not coming automatically but require some thought.

These ideas are not new, see e.g. Broström (1985). Long before software for survival analysis (read: Cox regression) was commonly available, in the late 1970s, Jan M. Hoem taught us how to do this with software analyzing loglinear models for contingency tables, see Hoem (1987); Hoem and Mureşan (2011) and Laird and Olivier (1981). This is interesting: Because there were no good statistical software for survival analysis around 1980, innovative methods like the log-linear models were found to work outside their so-called natural domain. When later new software appeared for direct survival analysis these methods were forgotten (more or less). Now they are found useful again, but for a different reason: We are analyzing larger and larger data sets, and raw calculation ties up too much time and other resources, so by thinking and remembering the theory about sufficient statistics, we can do things much faster and with much smaller, and anonymous, data sets (tables).

6 Analysis, all births

6.1 Stopping and spacing

We consider the development of a stopping behavior both by period and by cohort. It is measured by the ' m ' of Coale and Trussell (1978). Similarly, the spacing behavior is measured by their ' M '. We show the development by period and by cohort, in both cases for each `hisclass`, adjusted for `marriage age` and `parish`. The results are only shown graphically, and the reason is that there are many three-way interactions involved, see Table 5.

The variable V has the regression coefficient m , Coale-Trussell's "little m ". This model contains no less than 240 estimated coefficients: You do not want to see them in print, and I certainly do not want to show them. Instead, first I show the statistical significance of the

	Df	Deviance	AIC	LRT	Pr(>Chi)
<none>		10066.27	34027.16		
V:marAge:period	21	10107.79	34026.68	41.52	0.0048
V:marAge:parish	24	10108.40	34021.29	42.13	0.0125
V:period:parish	47	10139.30	34006.19	73.03	0.0088

Table 5: Likelihood Ratio tests of threeway interaction effects.

three-way interactions in Table 5. Then, in what follows, the results are graphically reported. The development over time may be driven by time periods or cohorts (or both).

6.1.1 By period

From Figure 10 is seen that there are two time periods in the nineteenth century, 1851--1880 and 1881-1900, and five ten-year-long periods in the twentieth century. For each period, and for each `hisclass`, a Poisson regression model is fitted as follows (exemplified with the period 1931-1940 and `hisclass = 3`):

```
fit <- glm(event ~ offset(log(N * exposure)) + V + urban + marAge,
  data = kTab, family = poisson,
  subset = (hisclass == "farmer" & period == "1931-1940"))
```

The result is shown in Table 6.

	Estimate	Std. Error
(Intercept)	-0.3716	0.0263
V	0.4987	0.0349
urbanTRUE	-0.2223	0.1182
marAge(25,30]	0.1534	0.0319
marAge(30,35]	0.2745	0.0515
marAge(35,50]	0.4675	0.0957

Table 6: Parameter estimates, Poisson regression.

From this we get that $\hat{M} = \exp(-0.3716) = 0.690$ and $\hat{m} = 0.499$, that is, strong signs of both spacing (small \hat{M}) and stopping (large \hat{m}). Note that the $M = \exp(\text{Intercept})$ is evaluated for the reference category, *rural* residence and *marriage age* (15, 25].

This is then repeated for all hisclasses and all periods, and the results are shown in Figure 11, where it is clear that the `elite` is introducing a *stopping* behavior already in the late nineteenth century (lower panel), while the `middle class` is leading in lowering the overall level, or *spacing*. Farmers are slow in both respects.

[Figure 11 about here.]

6.1.2 By cohort

Then we show the development by cohort and hisclass, see Figure 12. Now the spacing behavior disappears completely, while the stopping behavior is a little more accentuated compared to the period analysis.

[Figure 12 about here.]

An explanation to this may be that the CT model fits best to cohort data, and when looking at period data, a mixture of cohorts in different stages of stopping is resulting.

6.2 TMFR

We repeat the analyses with *TMFR* replacing (M, m) .

Figure 13 shows the TMFR by hisclass and period. The elite and the middle class are slightly ahead in the fertility decline, while farmers and unskilled workers lags behind. There are no big differences at all in the last period, 1941–1950.

[Figure 13 about here.]

The cohort analysis, on the other hand, gives a weak differential between hisclasses, even if the elite and the middle class are slightly ahead, see Figure 14.

[Figure 14 about here.]

A drawback with the TMFR is that it gives an overly optimistic view of the marital fertility and number of births per woman (Hoem and Mureşan, 2011). With the cohort data a radical solution is available: Count the number of births in a cohort and relate that number to the total number of women contributing to the cohort. The result is seen in Figure 15.

[Figure 15 about here.]

As expected, the overall levels are much lower than the TMFR, but what stands out is the farmers' relatively high level. A partial explanation to this may be that the average fertile period length per married woman is 18.2 years for farmers, but only 14.7 years for non-farmers. And that may be explained by the fact that farmers on average are more stationary than others.

7 Analysis, surviving births

We define (for now) a *surviving birth* as a birth of a child that survives at least one year after birth. Technically, in the counting process framework, the time point of such birth is *not a stopping time* (we need to wait one year after a birth to know if it can be classified as a success), but it is a minor problem in this context. If we instead define an event time as the time when an infant turns into a child (at the first birthday), we have a stopping time, and subtracting one does not change that fact; we can regard it as a change of time scale. Of course, it may happen that it is impossible to decide if a birth results in a child one year later, but it is quite rare in our data, and we chose to ignore it: such a birth is regarded as a survivor.

The Ccoale-Trussell model will once again be used in the analysis, which is a repetition of the one in the previous section, but with the new version of a birth. If the infant death is independent of parity, we would expect that m would be the same but M would be reduced.

With the new data set, where `event` is replaced by `event1` (indicating a birth that survives for one year), we get the results presented in the rest of this section.

Stopping

First, we consider the development of a stopping behavior both by period and by cohort, see Figure 16.

[Figure 16 about here.]

Then we repeat the cohort approach with surviving births, see Figure 17.

[Figure 17 about here.]

Compared to the corresponding figures with all births, nothing much changes, which would imply that a stopping behavior later in time is not a consequence of decreasing infant mortality.

The TMFR for survivors are shown in Figure 18. Here we can see slightly lower levels than in the case with all births, which is quite natural since the TMFR directly measures level in contrast to Coale-Trussell's m .

[Figure 18 about here.]

Finally, we show the expected number of surviving infants per woman in Figure 19. Nothing spectacular, just slightly lower levels compared to the case with all infant births per woman.

[Figure 19 about here.]

8 Conclusion

The fertility decline starts in the upper classes (**official** and **business**) in the decades prior to the turn of the century. The **farming** part of the population is characterized by a relatively high fertility in high ages until the end of the study period. It is also by far the largest group in the society, near 45 per cent are in the farming category on average over the study period. Towards the end of the period this share is decreasing markedly.

The question of whether it is spacing or stopping that dominates the behavioral explanation of the fertility decline over time is not definitively settled, but the stopping measure, Coale-Trussell's "little m " shows a more dramatic change over time than the corresponding spacing measure "big M ". This is especially true in the cohort setting.

The effect of the declining infant and child mortality on the stopping or spacing behavior in fertility is minor.

A topic for future research is the interplay between mother's age and duration in marriage. It is intuitively very reasonable to use "time in marriage" as the basic time scale instead of "age", but how that would effect the spacing and stopping models is still in the open. One option is to utilize a two-dimensional basic time scale.

This work was done in the **R** environment for statistical analysis (R Core Team, 2017), mainly with the package **eha** (Broström, 2017, 2012).

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15	Number of births per woman by hisclass and cohort	27
16	Coale-Trussell's m by hisclass and period, surviving births	27
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18	TMFR by hisclass and period, surviving births	28
19	Number of surviving births per woman by hisclass and cohort	29



Figure 1: Sweden in Europe.

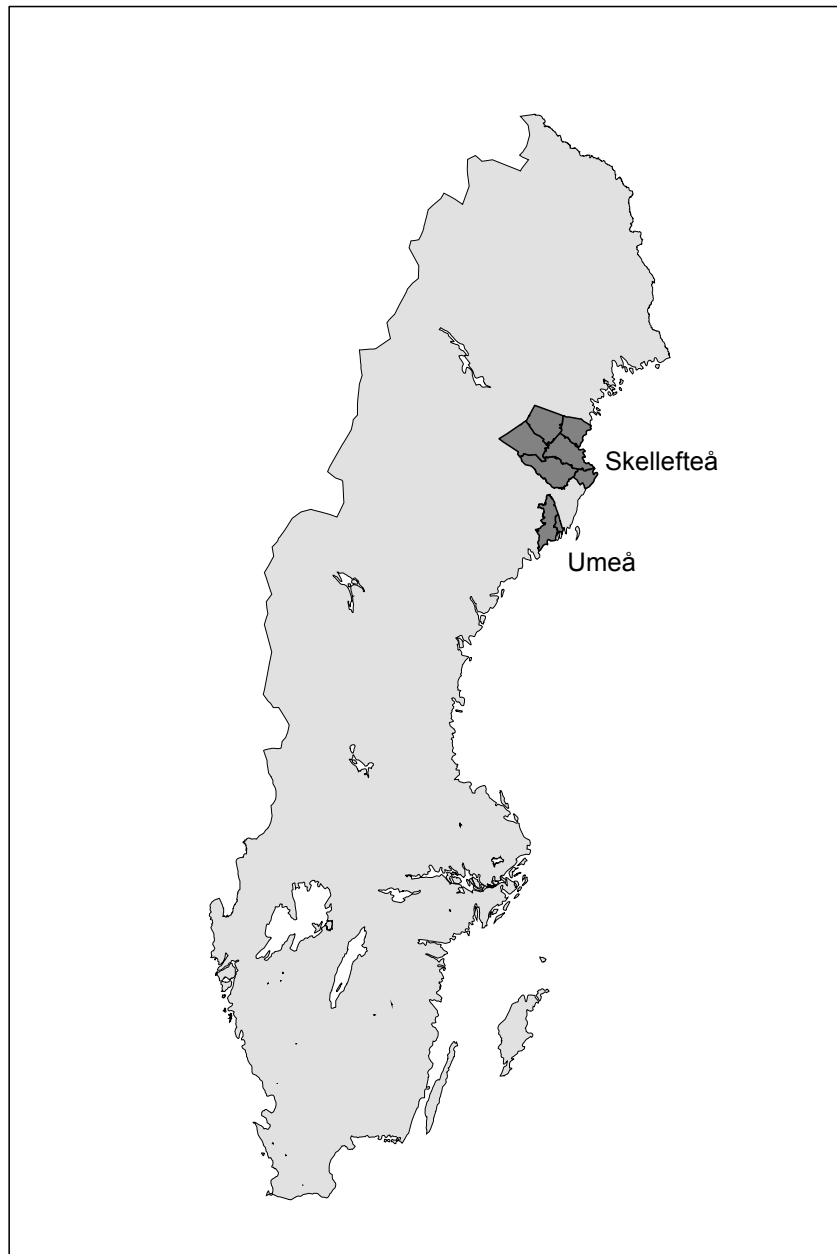


Figure 2: The Skellefteå and Umeå regions in Sweden.

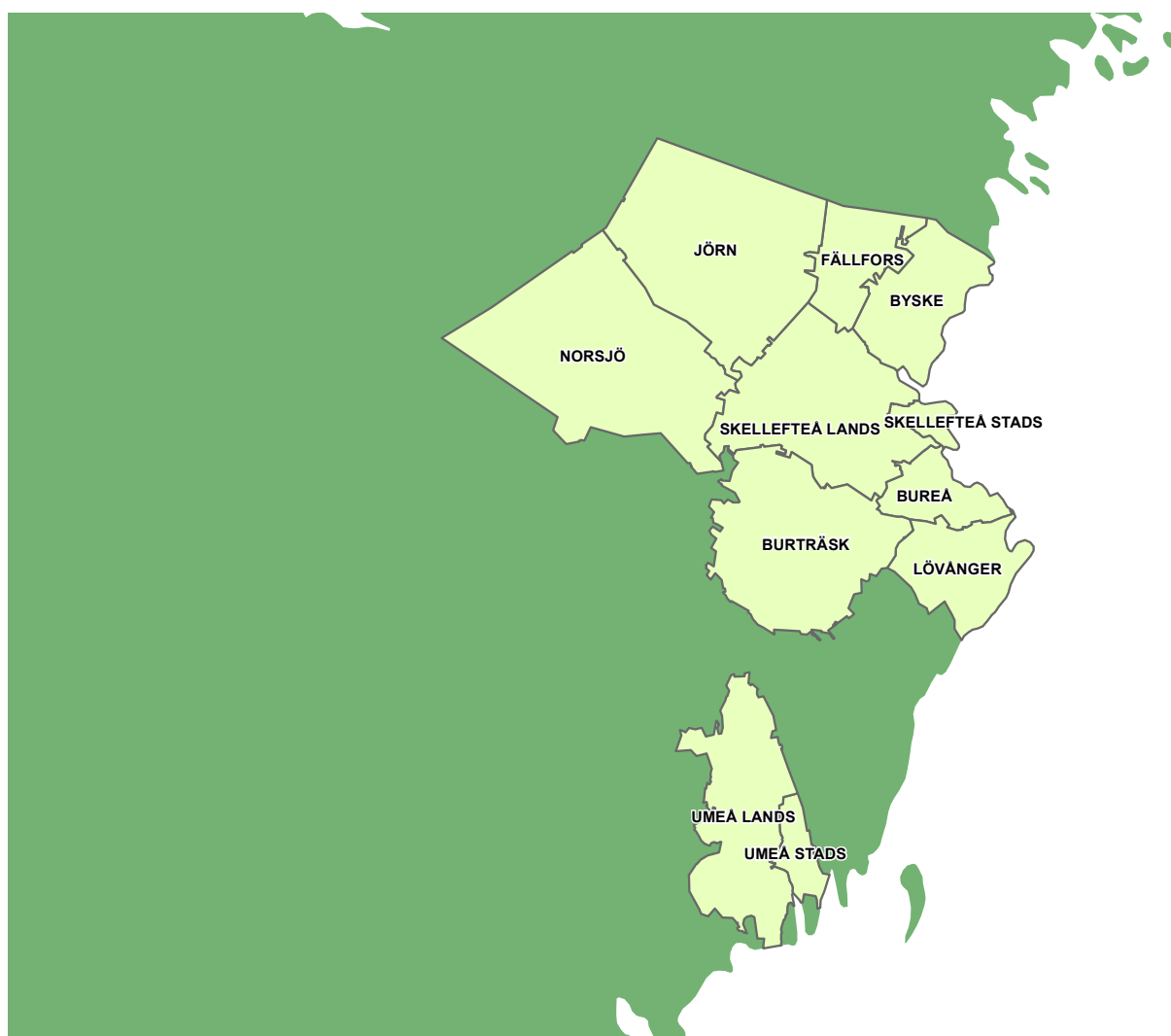


Figure 3: The Skellefteå and Umeå regions.

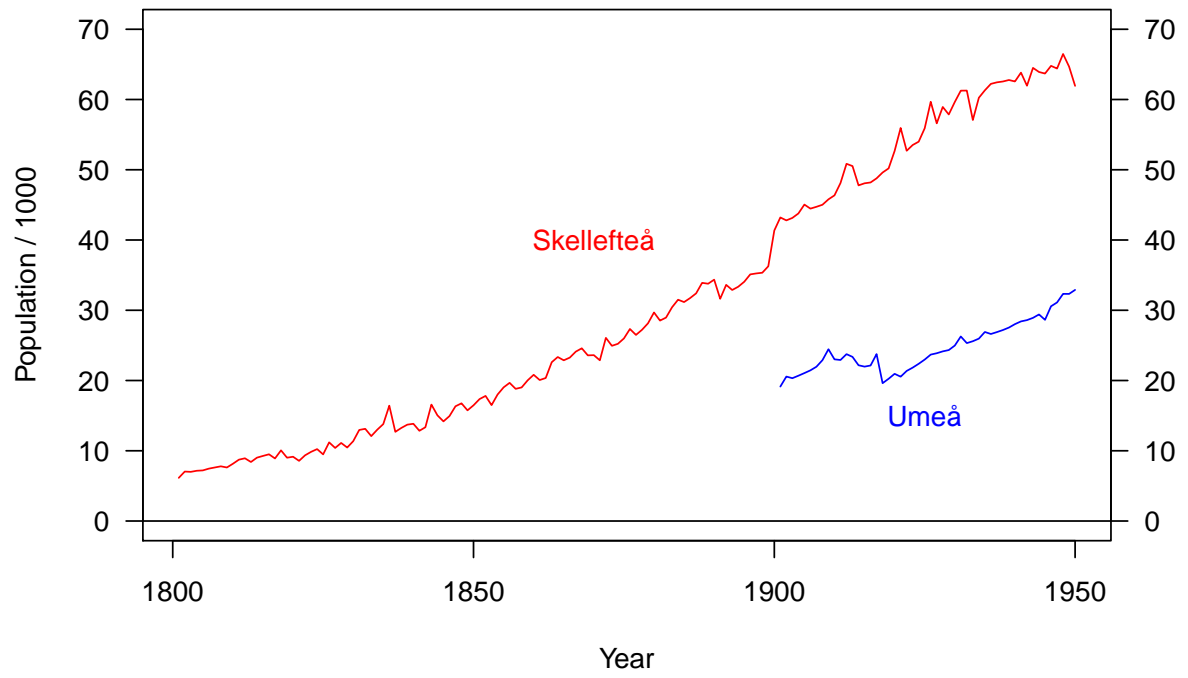


Figure 4: Population size by year and region.

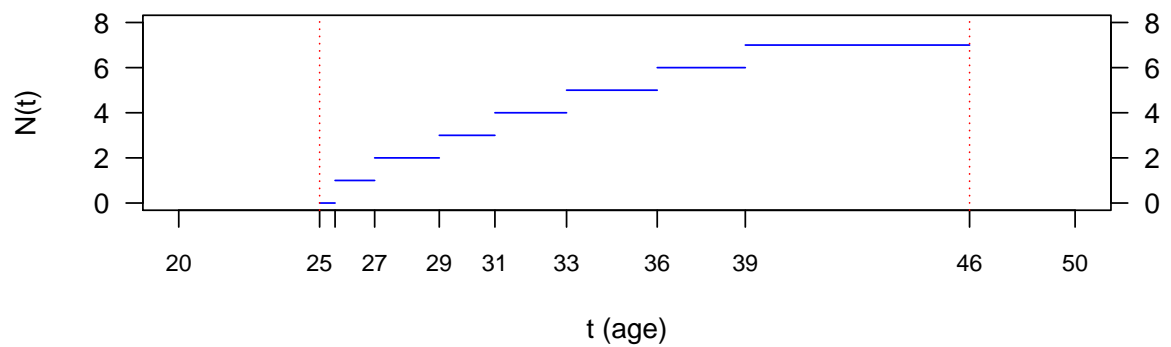


Figure 5: Birth history as a counting process, woman with id 233.

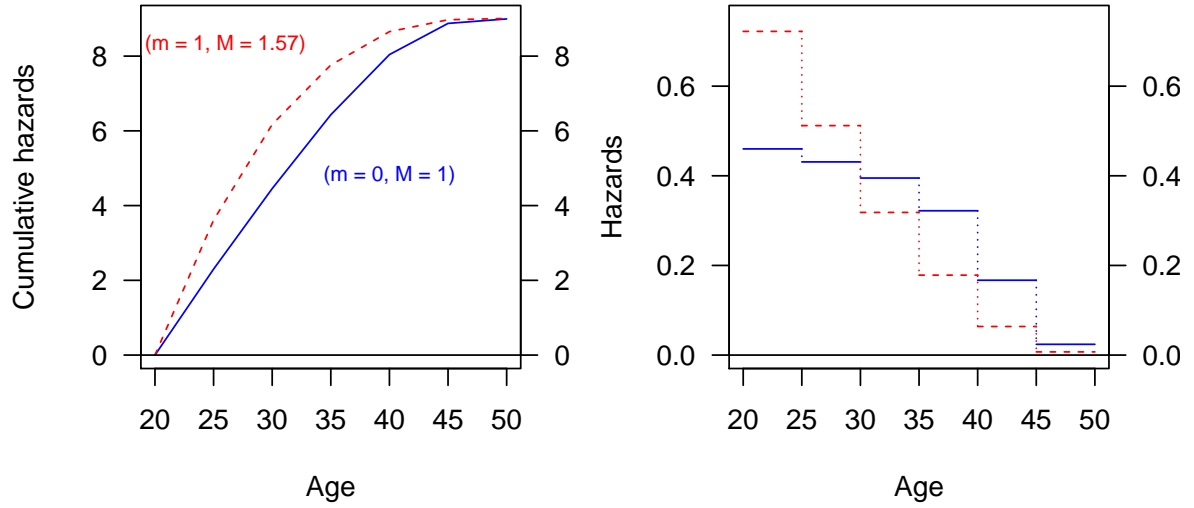


Figure 6: The Coale-Trussell (CT) distribution, two examples: $(m = 0, M = 1)$ is solid, $(m = 1, M = 1.57)$ is dashed.

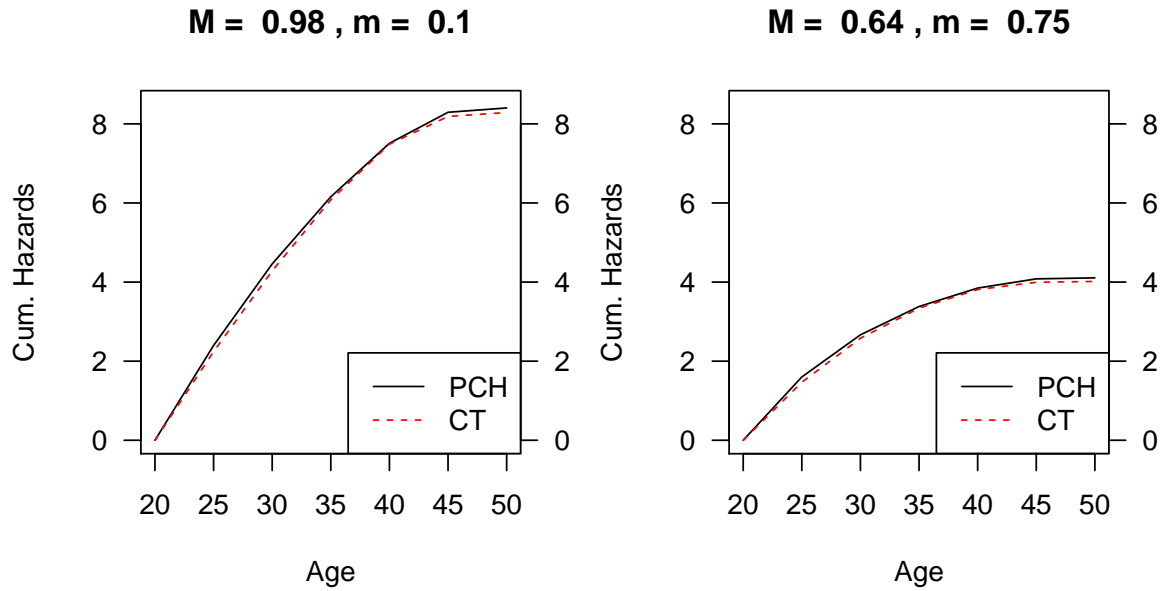


Figure 7: Evaluation of the Coale-Trussell (CT) model, compared to a piecewise constant (PCH) model. Left panel from the time period 1851–80, the right panel from 1931–40. Non-farmers.

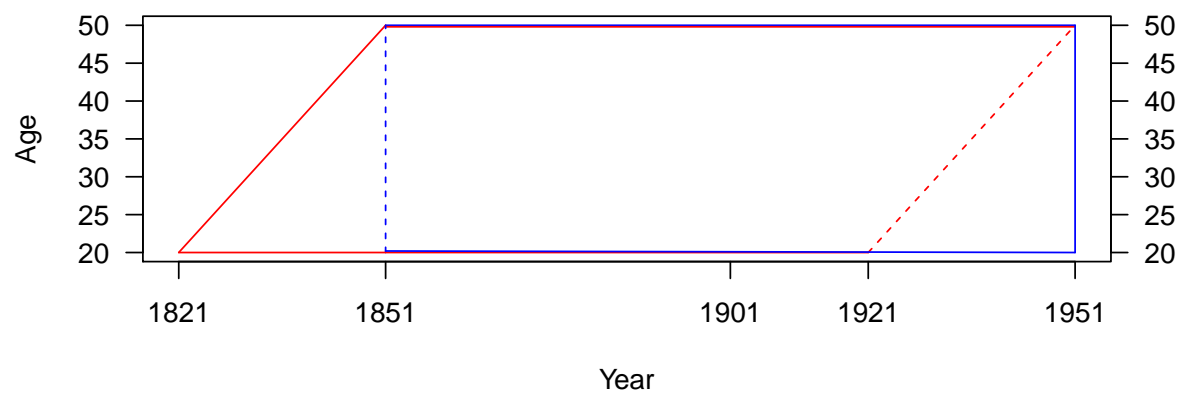


Figure 8: The sampling frame (solid lines) by married woman's age.

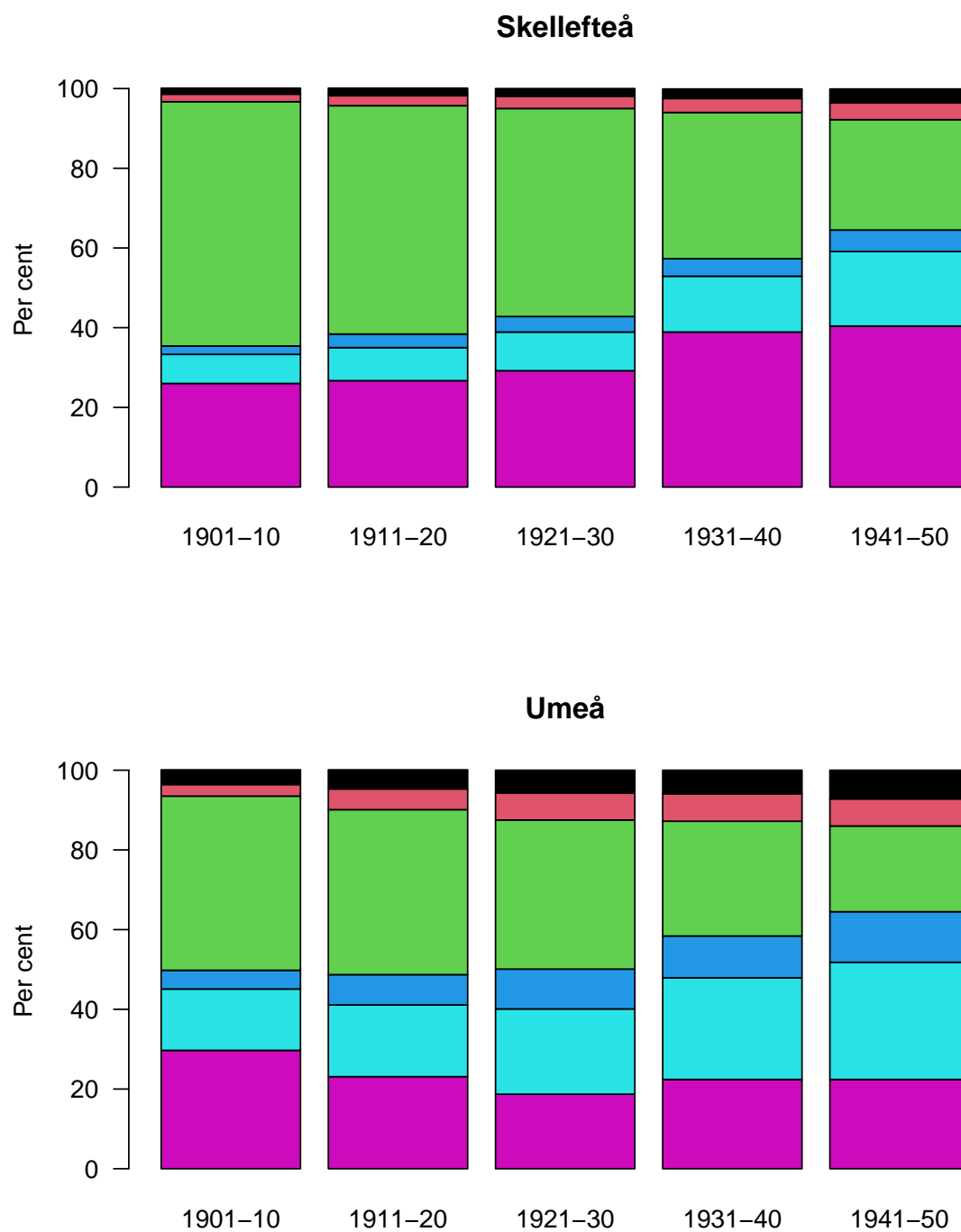


Figure 9: Exposure by hisclass and time period, Skellefteå (top) and Umeå (bottom). His-classes are ordered by number from top (1) to bottom (6).

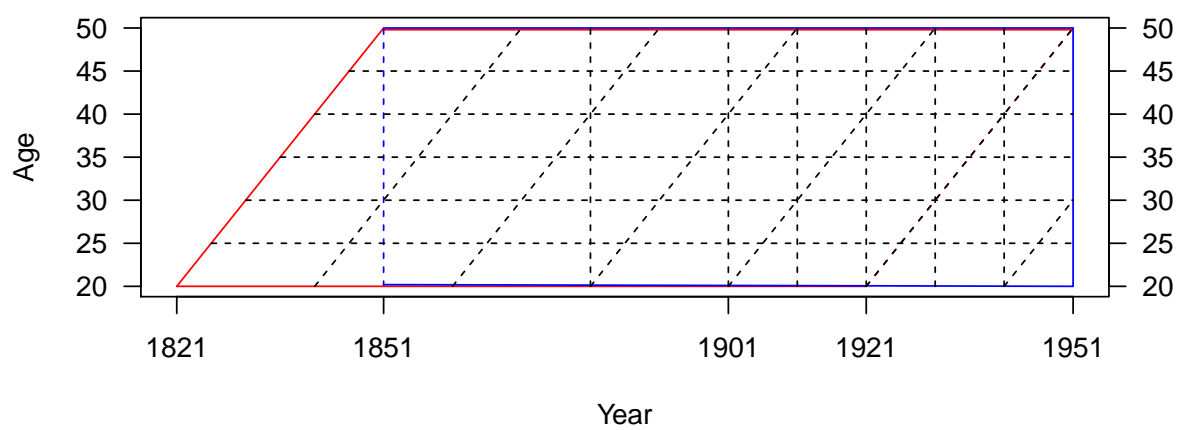


Figure 10: Lexis split. In each sub-area the number of births and total exposure time are calculated.

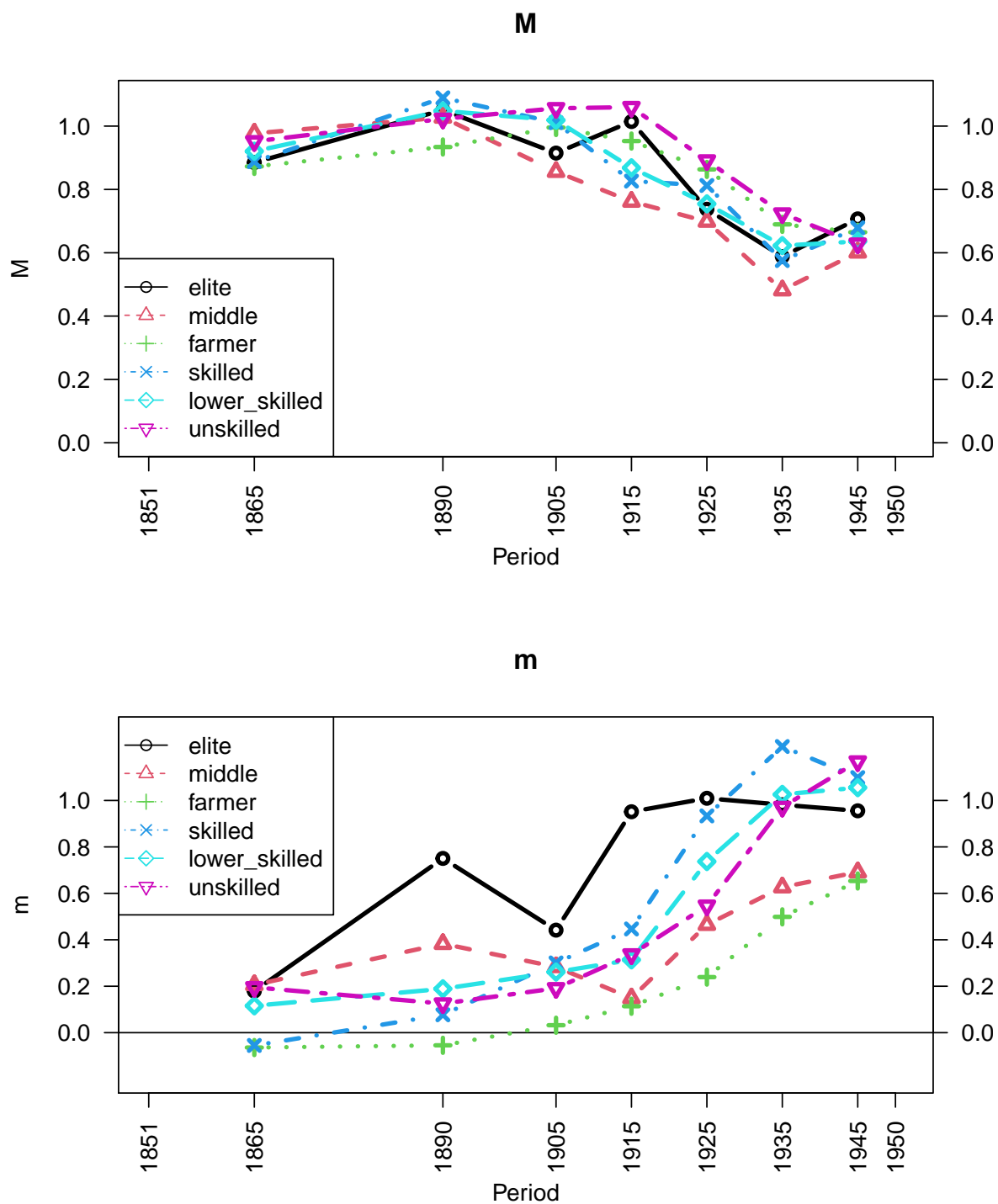


Figure 11: Coale-Trussell's M and m by hisclass and period.

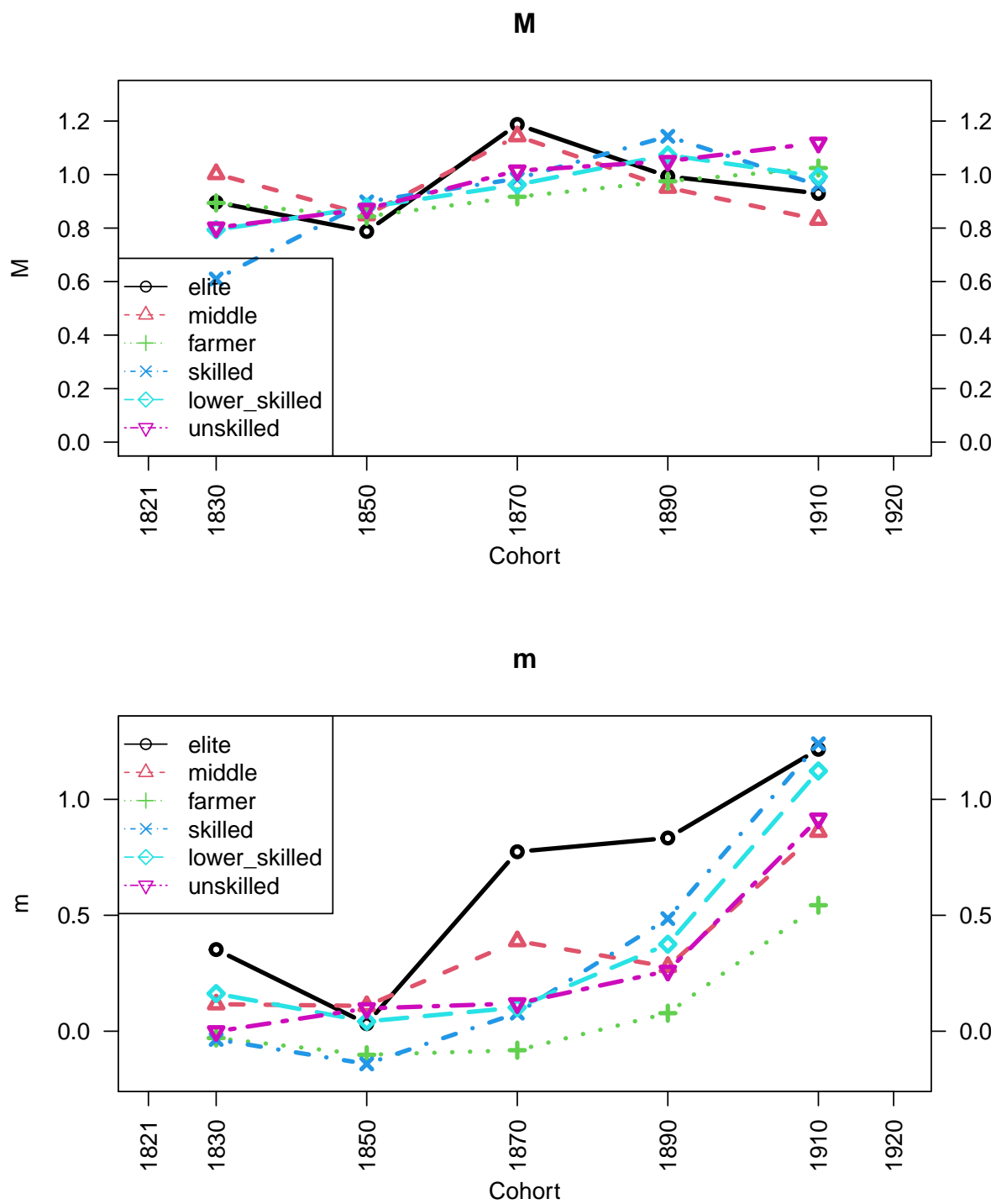


Figure 12: Coale-Trussell's M and m by hisclass and cohort.

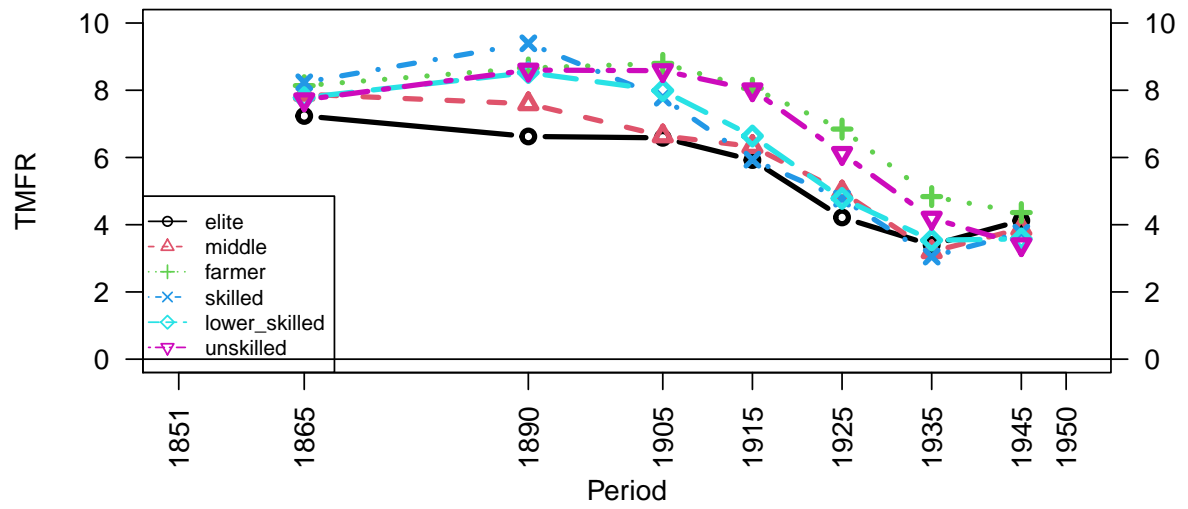


Figure 13: TMFR by hisclass and period.

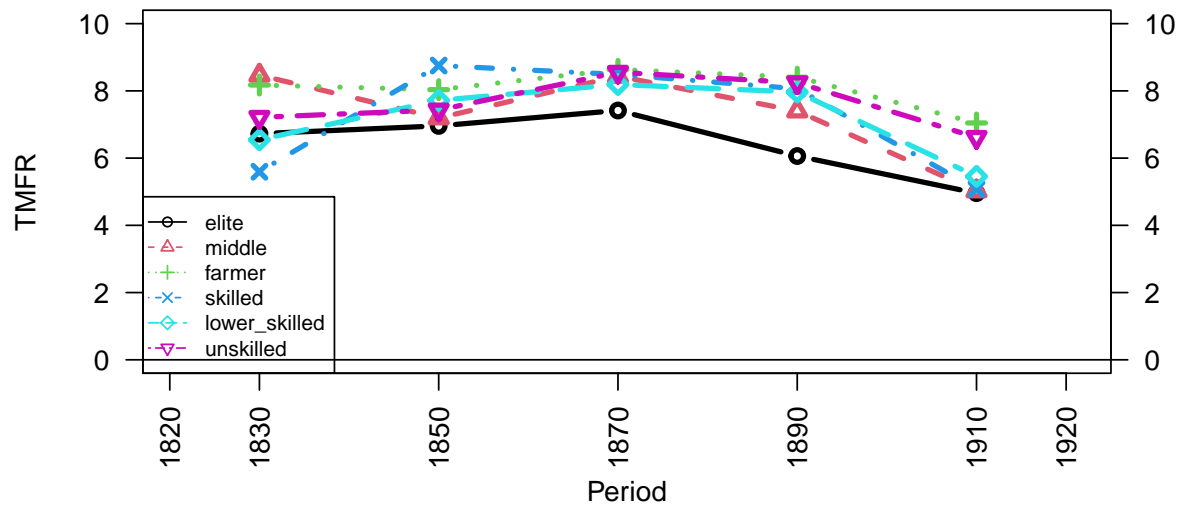


Figure 14: TMFR by hisclass and cohort.

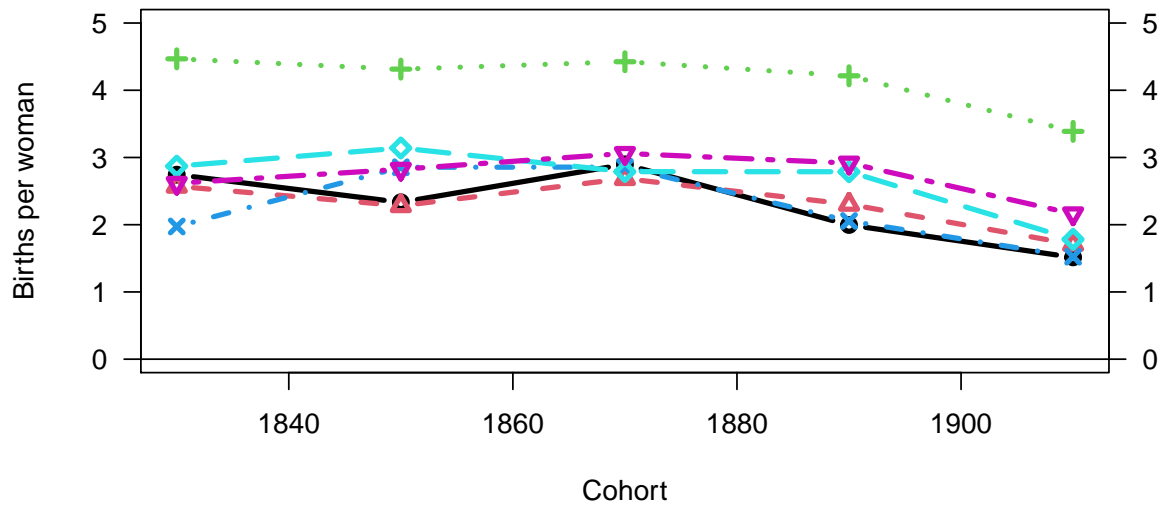


Figure 15: Number of births per woman by hisclass and cohort.

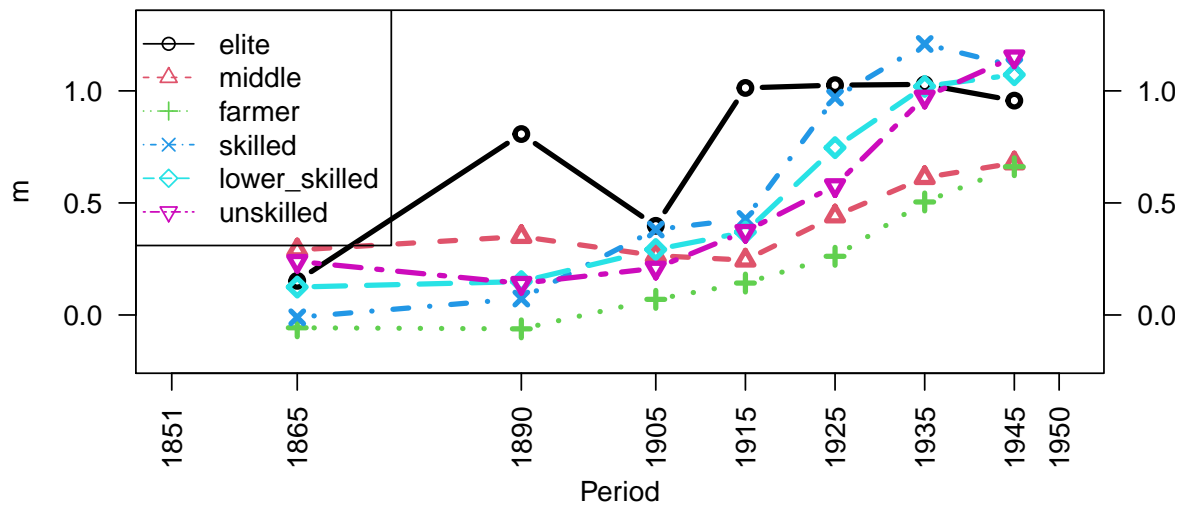


Figure 16: Coale-Trussell's m by hisclass and period, surviving births.

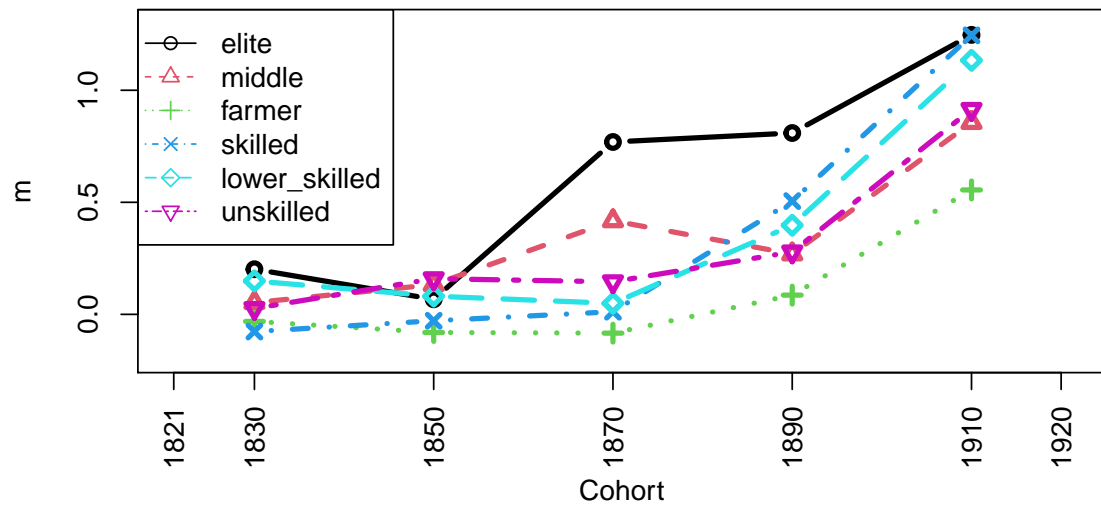


Figure 17: Coale-Trussell's m by hisclass and cohort, surviving births.

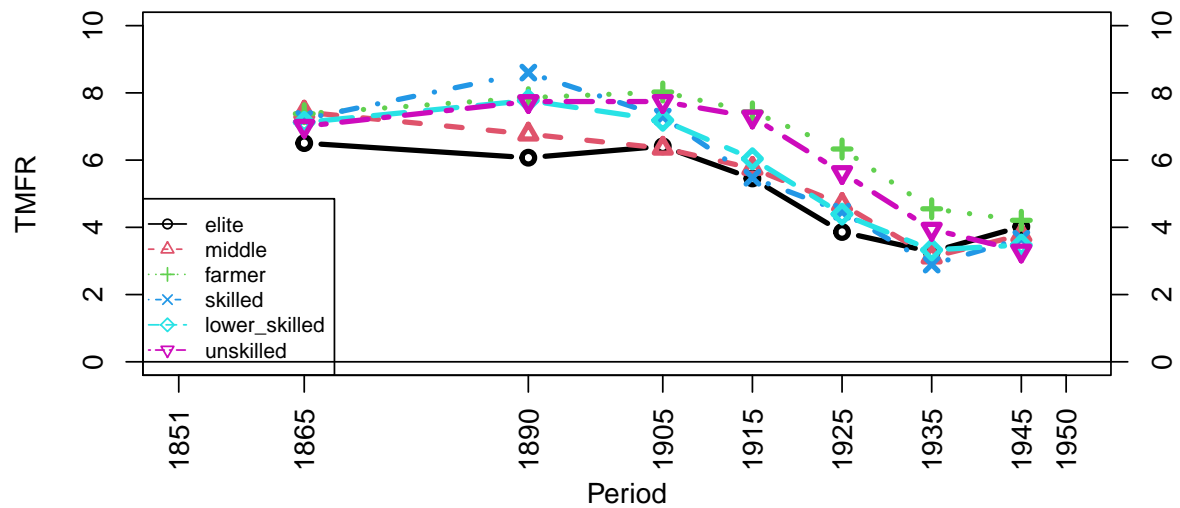


Figure 18: TMFR by hisclass and period, surviving births.

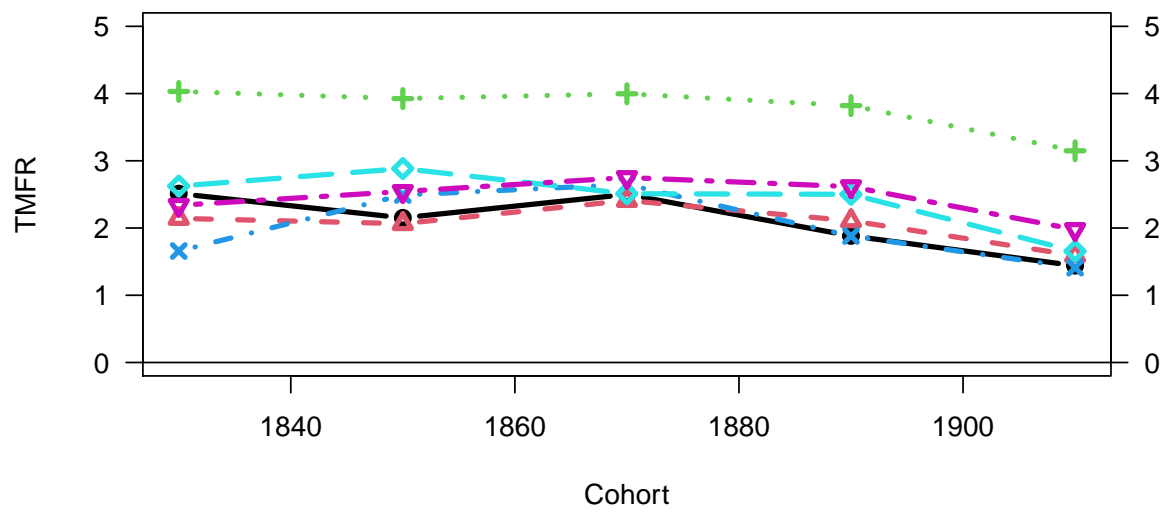


Figure 19: Number of surviving births per woman by hisclass and cohort.