The Concentration of Unemployment within Families and Social Networks

A Question of Attitudes or Structural Factors?

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This article studies the concentration of unemployment within families and social networks in Sweden. The study, which is based on two random samples, one consisting of some 47,000 young people and their parents and one consisting of 3,500 unemployed people, raises the question of whether unemployment concentration is mainly caused by negative values towards employment or by structural factors. The results show that it is common for people who are unemployed and have experienced longer periods of unemployment to have unemployed family members and friends. The causes of the unemployment concentration can be traced to structural factors such as class, ethnicity, age, unemployment rate and population in the district, rather than to the attitudes of the members of the unemployed group.

Introduction

The 1996 unemployment level in Sweden was approximately 8 per cent. If those in education and job-training are included this figure increases to around 13 per cent. Sweden has moved from being a country with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the OECD in 1991 to being one with an unemployment rate near the OECD average for the years 1993–96 (OECD, 1996). Today, slightly more than every tenth member of the Swedish labour force is outside the ordinary labour market, which means that unemployment no longer concerns only a marginal group of people. Almost everyone has some contact with unemployment and unemployed family members or friends in their daily lives.

This article studies the concentration of unemployment within families and social networks in Sweden. Unemployment concentration is a phenomenon that exists when unemployment is concentrated among two or more members of a family or among a number of people within a

friendship network. The phenomenon has been observed over the last few years, particularly in Great Britain and the Netherlands. Several studies have found a relationship between husbands' and wives' unemployment (Cooke, 1987; Davies *et al.*, 1994; Dilnot and Kell, 1987; Henkens *et al.*, 1993; Layard *et al.*, 1980; Molho and Elias, 1984; Morris, 1995; Murphy, 1995; Nordenmark, 1994; Pahl, 1988; Ultee *et al.*, 1988).

These studies show that it is more common for the unemployed to live together with partners who also are unemployed, compared to the non-unemployed. The most common explanation for this phenomenon in Great Britain has to do with how the benefit system operates. Several studies show that the construction of these systems encourages wives to stop working when their husbands become unemployed (Davies *et al.*, 1994; Dilnot and Kell, 1987; Layard *et al.*, 1980; Morris, 1995; Murphy, 1995). Apart from this explanation, the above studies have difficulty in explaining the fact that the unemployed often reside with

unemployed partners. Some factors that have been shown to increase the risk of unemployment concentration in some of the studies are a shortage of jobs in the region, high age, and the existence of children. Davies *et al.* (1994) and Ultee *et al.* (1988) call attention to the fact that it is difficult to separate causal mechanisms that derive from structural factors from more complex motivational influences arising out of the interaction between unemployed cohabiting individuals.

Stafford (1980) and Payne (1987) have found that it is more common for unemployed youths to have unemployed parents, compared to non-unemployed young people. Payne (1987) found statistically significant differences which showed that 35 per cent of the unemployed youths between 16 and 19 years of age had at least one unemployed parent, while the same figure for youths in employment was 12 per cent. Possible explanations for this phenomenon are, according to Payne (1987), that it is easier to adapt to unemployment when one family member is unemployed, that informal access to employment is reduced for the unemployed, and that employers have negative attitudes towards young people with unemployed parents.

In addition to the studies indicating that unemployment tends to be concentrated in families, there are also studies that show that unemployment hits those who have a friendship relationship with one another (Allatt and Yeandle, 1992; Gallie *et al.*, 1994; Morris, 1995; Morris and Irwin, 1992). In other words, it is more common that the unemployed have unemployed friends than it is for the non-unemployed to have unemployed friends. Morris and Irwin (1992) show that about one quarter of the long-term unemployed have friends who are also unemployed, which is quite astonishing if compared to the 1½ per cent figure they find for the employed. While 80 per cent of the employed responded that most of their friends were employed, the same figure for the long-term unemployed was 26 per cent. The authors establish the fact that unemployment concentration within social networks is related to class in that the concentration phenomenon is more frequent in lower levels of the class structure. The length of time in unemployment is also related to the occurrence of concentration: the longer the duration of unemployment, the more common it is to have unemployed friends.

A Problem of Structures or Attitudes?

To sum up, the above studies unambiguously show that unemployment tends to be concentrated within families and social networks, at least in the countries studied. However, finding the causes of the phenomenon presents some difficulties. The few results and hypotheses that have been put forward concerning the causes of unemployment concentration can be divided into two models of explanation, one structural and one attitudinal.

The results supporting structural causes of unemployment concentration have indicated that it is primarily factors which, at least in some way, are beyond individuals' control that affect the occurrence of unemployment concentration. Variables that have been tested, and in some contexts have been shown to have some relevance, are the benefit system, region, age, and the presence of children. However, these variables have not been able to satisfactorily explain the concentration phenomenon. When the structural factors have not generated the expected effects, some of the studies argue that concentration of unemployment might be caused by low work values and a high degree of adaptation that is often assumed to exist in groups with high levels of unemployment.

We now arrive at the second of the two models of explanation. Several studies during recent years have observed this kind of value orientation, often referred to as 'a culture of unemployment', in certain groups with high levels of unemployment. These values are characterized by an acceptance of unemployment, a rejection of the work ethic, a low commitment to employment, and the development of alternative activities and survival strategies (Engbersen, 1989; Roberts *et al.*, 1982). While the structural model of explanation tries to explain concentration of unemployment through variables that are connected with structural position in life, the attitudinal model of explanation maintains that the causes of the phenomenon can be traced to the attitudes of the unemployed individuals.

The aim of this article is to study the occurrence of unemployment concentration in Sweden and to map out some possible causes of the phenomenon. In light of the above discussion, the purpose is to investigate if the concentration of unemployment can be seen as an attitudinal and/or a structural

problem. The author is well aware that the distinction between these two factors is problematic. There is no sharp dividing-line between the subjective and the structural factors; the two factors probably affect one another. For analytical reasons however, the two models of explanations are regarded as separate in this study.

Research in this field is justified for several reasons. One is that, irrespective of whether the concentration phenomenon arises from attitudinal or structural causes, it can be seen as a problem for society as a whole. If concentration of unemployment is related to lower levels of work values it can, in the end, undermine the welfare state, which is, at least to some extent, based on the existence of a relatively high degree of work commitment among individuals. This can also be seen as a moral dilemma: who is supposed to support groups of people who are unwilling to work? If unemployment concentration is caused by structural factors and is against the individuals' will, there are reasons to believe that this group suffers more economically and mentally than others.

It is also important to examine the causes of the phenomenon because the results may influence decisions about what kinds of measures would be most effective in counteracting the concentration of unemployment. If it is a question of low work values and adaptation to unemployment one could, through for example economic restrictions, strengthen incentives towards employment. This would probably prove ineffective, however, if members of groups with high levels of unemployment already suffer economically and are motivated to work.

Method

Data

The empirical data consist of two data-sets. The first is a collection statistical material compiled by the Centre for Epidemiology, at the National Swedish Social Services Board, which has the unique advantage that it consists of data about both young people born during 1965–76, as well as their parents. It is composed primarily of registry data from the 1990 census (FoB, 1990) and the Swedish Labour Market Board's so-called

HÄNDEL register. A random sample of 4 per cent (c. 47,000) young people have, together with their parents, been drawn from the 1990 census. The data from HÄNDEL consists of information concerning the young people's and their parents' labour-market status from 1991 until May 1995 and some other background variables such as age, education, citizenship, etc. This data-set is referred to as 'EPC' in this article and is used when studying the relationship between young people and their parents' unemployment.

The second data-set is based on a field investigation called the Long-term Unemployment Project (LUP). At the beginning of 1996, a random sample of 3,500 unemployed people was drawn from the same HÄNDEL register, as was described above (in this material the HÄNDEL data date back as far as 1992). The interviews were conducted by telephone and 74 per cent of those questioned responded to the questions. Only 7 per cent of the non-response was caused by a refusal to take part in the investigation. The rest was due to factors like unpublished telephone numbers, people who were not residing in Sweden at the time of the investigation, etc. In addition, 30 per cent of around 2,500 respondents who were registered as unemployed answered, at the time of the interview, that they were actually not unemployed and were therefore excluded from the study. The questions deal with such subjects as partners' and friends' employment status, work commitment, job-search activity, spare-time activity, well-being, and economic situation. The strength of this material is that it consists of both registry and subjective data. This data-set is used when studying the concentration of unemployment within couples and social networks.

Methods and Variables

When investigating how the concentration phenomenon has developed over time, odds ratios (OR) have been used. Odds ratios are arrived at by dividing the odds of a category (unemployed) by the odds of another category (non-employed) having an unemployed parent. By calculating odds ratios it is possible to investigate whether the relative risk of unemployment concentration has increased from one year to another.

The method used for analysing attitudinal and structural causes of unemployment concentration is logistic regression which is one of the few multivariate techniques that allows a dichotomous dependent variable. The method is based on the probability of an event occurring. The choice of the independent variables in the logistic regression is in some sense based on the discussion at the beginning of the article. Some of them require a short explanation. The variable *unemployment duration* consists of the total number of weeks in unemployment since 1991 for EPC and since 1992 for LUP. *Unemployment rate* stands for the unemployment rate in the district and age is based on the father in the case of young people and on the respondent in the case of unemployed partners and friends. *Class* is based on the highest class position within the family (SCB, 1995 – Swedish socio-economic classification) and the variable *Population* refers to the number of people living in each district. *Ethnicity* indicates whether the young person has non-Scandinavian citizenship in the case of LUP and if the respondent was born outside Scandinavia in the case of EPC.

The study tries to measure employment commitment and adaptability to the unemployment situation by using the Work Involvement Scale (WIS), the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), and some other questions concerning job-search activity, spare-time activity, and economic situation. The WIS-scale was developed by Warr *et al.* (1979) and consists of five statements such as: 'It is very important for you to be employed', 'You wish to continue working even if you could get enough money to live as comfortably as you want for the rest of your life', etc. It aims to measure subjective work orientation (see Nordenmark, forthcoming). The statements have been summarized to form an additive index that varies from 0 to 20, the higher the score, the higher the work involvement.

The dependent variable GHQ is also an additive index which, in this study, consists of twelve statements concerning general health and experience of day-to-day activities. The original development of the measure (Goldberg, 1972) resulted in a 60-item version, but the GHQ has also been reduced to 30, 20, and 12 items in several other studies. The reliability and validity coefficients for all versions are sufficiently high (Banks *et al.*, 1980). GHQ varies

from 0 to 36, the higher the score, the lower the well-being.

Job-search activity is measured by two questions concerning the number of hours that the unemployed people have spent looking for work, as well as how many times they have undertaken job-search initiatives. Spare-time activity is indicated by two questions about the difficulty of finding meaningful activities as unemployed people, and the economic situation is measured by a question concerning whether it is easy or hard to make ends meet.

Unemployment Concentration in Sweden

As discussed in the introduction, there are a number of international studies that show that unemployment tends to be concentrated in families and social networks. This section analyses how common it is that unemployed young people have at least one unemployed parent, how often the unemployed cohabit with an unemployed partner, and how common it is that the unemployed have friends who are also unemployed. The concentration phenomenon is also related to the duration of unemployment. In this study, an individual is defined as unemployed if he or she is registered as unemployed at the Employment Office.

The EPC data is used for analysing the relationship between young people's (19–30 years) and their parents' labour-market status. This data-set allows comparison between non-unemployed and unemployed young people concerning the occurrence of unemployed parents, and also enables the investigation of the occurrence of unemployment concentration over time. Table 1 compares non-unemployed and unemployed youths on the basis of whether they have unemployed parents or not.

As the figures in Table 1 show there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups of young people: 17 per cent of the non-unemployed, compared with 23 per cent of the unemployed, have at least one unemployed parent, indicating that unemployed youths have a greater probability of having an unemployed parent than non-unemployed youths. According to Morris (1995) the proportion of families in which more than one individual is unemployed has declined over the last few years in Great Britain. Figure 1 shows how the

Table 1. *Labour-market status by parents' labour-market status for young people aged 19–30 (%)*

Parents' labour-market status	Young people Non-unemployed	Unemployed	Sign
No one unemployed	82.7	77.4	
One unemployed	16.0	20.5	
Two unemployed	1.3	2.2	***
N	37,932	8,633	46,565

*** = $p < 0.001$.

Source: EPC 1995.

Figure 1. *For young people (born 1965–76) unemployment incidence by the risk, and relative risk (OR), of having at least one parent with unemployment experience in 1992, 1993, and 1994 (EPC)*

concentration of unemployment amongst young people (the same individuals every year) and their parents has developed over three years of increasing unemployment in Sweden.

The figure compares both young people who have not been unemployed and those who have been unemployed at some point during the years under study on the basis of whether they have at least one parent who has also been unemployed during the same periods. The percentage of young people with some unemployment experience who have at least one parent with unemployment experience

increased from 26 per cent in 1992 to 33 per cent in 1994. Figure 1 also shows an increase in the risk for the non-employed of having parents with unemployment experience. However, the odds ratios for the three years are 1.37 for 1992, 1.37 for 1993, and 1.44 for 1994. This shows that the relative risk (OR) for young people with unemployment experience of having parents with unemployment experience was the same in 1992 and 1993, but increased in 1994. More data is needed to investigate if this is just a temporary shift or if it is the beginning of a more stable increase.

Table 2. *Unemployment duration between 1991–1995 (EPC) and 1992–1996 (LUP) by concentration of unemployment at the time of the selection (%)*

Unemployment concentration	Length of unemployment				Sign
	< 1 year	1–2 years	2–3 years	> 3 years	
<i>Unemployed young people (19–30)^a</i>					
No parent unemployed	79.2	77.6	76.0	75.6	
At least one parent unemployed	20.8	22.4	24.0	24.4	*
N	2432	2705	2145	1296	8578
<i>Unemployed cohabiters^b</i>					
Partner not unemployed	84.3	82.8	77.8	75.6	
Partner unemployed	15.7	17.2	22.2	24.4	*
N	216	215	225	336	992
<i>Unemployed respondents^b</i>					
Two or less friends unemployed	50.4	41.8	41.5	36.0	
A few unemployed friends	30.3	33.0	36.0	35.8	
50% or more of friends unemployed	19.3	25.1	22.5	28.1	***
N	393	342	386	583	1704

*** = $p < 0.001$; ** = $p < 0.01$; * = $p < 0.05$.

Sources: ^aEPC; ^bLUP.

The question of whether there exists a relationship between duration of unemployment and the occurrence of unemployment concentration will now be addressed. The analyses of young people are based on the EPC data and the results concerning the existence of unemployed partners and friends are generated from the LUP data. The amount of time in unemployment is measured by summing the total number of weeks in unemployment.

As can be seen in Table 2, there is a statistically significant higher risk for young people with a considerable number of days in unemployment to have at least one unemployed parent at the time of the study, compared with those who have shorter periods of unemployment. Almost 21 per cent of young people who had been unemployed no more than one year since 1991 have at least one unemployed parent. For young people who have been unemployed for more than three years, the proportion is 24 per cent.

When studying the relationship between cohabiting respondents and their partners' labour-market status, one can see that it is common that the unemployed live together with partners who also are unemployed. Approximately 20 per cent of the unemployed in the LUP material live together with

an unemployed partner. Even in this case one can see the same pattern as was observed in the case of youths when studying the relationship between unemployment duration and the occurrence of unemployment concentration. Table 2 shows that 16 per cent of cohabiting respondents who had been unemployed no more than one year have an unemployed partner. This is quite a contrast if compared with the figure of 24 per cent for those who had been unemployed for more than three years. The data does not allow comparison with the employed but there is no doubt that the unemployed in general, and the long-term unemployed in particular, often have partners who are also unemployed.

As discussed earlier, there are studies suggesting that the unemployed often report that friends are also unemployed. In this study, about 11 per cent of the respondents report that most of their friends are unemployed and 13 per cent respond that approximately 50 per cent of their friends are unemployed. Only 19 per cent say that none of their friends are unemployed. Table 2 shows the relationship between duration of unemployment and the proportion of unemployed people in the social network. The connection is not as linear as in the case of the existence of unemployed parents and partners, but it does exist. About 19 per cent of those with one year or

less in unemployment, compared with 28 per cent of those who had been unemployed more than three years, report that at least half of their friends are unemployed. For respondents with less than three unemployed friends the proportions are 50 and 36 per cent, respectively.

To sum up, the data that has been analysed in this section shows that unemployment tends to be concentrated in certain families and social networks in Sweden. The figures that are comparable over time indicate that the phenomenon is more common during the last year of the analysis. The concentration phenomenon is also related to duration of unemployment. Respondents with longer unemployment experience have unemployed parents, partners, and friends more often than those with shorter unemployment duration. The question that still remains to be analysed concerns which factors cause the observed concentration of unemployment. Is it mainly a question of attitudes and/or structural factors? This is the subject of the following section.

Work Commitment and Adaptation or Structural Factors

As was mentioned in the introduction, the main aim of this article is to study empirically whether it is the existence of negative attitudes towards work or/and structural factors that generate unemployment concentration. The attitudinal model of explanation can be divided into two hypotheses. In the first place it is possible that the unemployed become acquainted with each other because they share negative attitudes towards employment. Secondly, it is also possible that these kinds of attitudes are generated from the interaction between the members of the unemployed group, which leads to them adapting to the unemployment situation and ceasing their search for employment. If one, or both, of these hypotheses have some relevance, then the unemployed who have a close relationship with a large number of other unemployed people should have a lower commitment to employment and be more adapted to the unemployment situation, compared with other unemployed people.

In addition to the attitudinal explanation, some studies have discussed how structural factors like

education, class, age, etc. influence the occurrence of concentration of unemployment in families and social networks (Henkens *et al.*, 1993; Morris and Irwin, 1992; Davis *et al.*, 1994; Ullte *et al.*, 1988). In this case it is factors that are connected with the structural position in life that are assumed to influence the risk of unemployment concentration. If this hypothesis is valid it should mainly be categories of people who have a marginal position in the labour market, like the poorly educated, the young, immigrants, etc., who often have friends, partners, and parents who are also unemployed. The logistic regression analysis presented in Table 3 shows how variables that measure attitudinal and structural factors are related to unemployment concentration. In the analyses of the risk of having unemployed parents, which is based on data from EPC, it is possible to include only structural factors.

Some variables that have been related to unemployment concentration in earlier studies showed no such relation in this investigation, and were therefore excluded from Table 3. Hypotheses suggesting that some couples are unemployed because they have children at home are not verified in this study. One possible explanation for why partners of the unemployed are also unemployed is that they have been employed in the same sector or at the same place of work. However, there is no significant relationship between this variable and the occurrence of an unemployed partner in this study. Finally, it is quite common that British studies regard wives' unemployment as caused by their husbands' unemployment. If husbands' unemployment causes wives' unemployment, but not the other way around, it should be more common that men live together with an unemployed female than vice versa. This is not the case in this study, however. There is no significant difference between men and women concerning the existence of an unemployed partner.

As the multivariate analysis in Table 3 shows, there is no pattern that indicates a lower work value in groups with a high concentration of unemployment. There is no significant correlation between work involvement and the existence of unemployed friends and partners. If lower levels of employment commitment exist in families and social networks with a high concentration of unemployment it stands to reason that they would not search for

Table 3. Results of a logistic regression of unemployed respondents with at least 50% of their friends unemployed, unemployed and cohabiting with an unemployed partner, and aged 19–30 with an unemployed parent by structural factors and variables measuring employment commitment and adaptability

	> 50% of friends unemployed ^a	Partner unemployed ^a	Parent unemployed ^b
<i>Work commitment and adaptation</i>			
Work involvement	–0.034 (3.0482)	0.0201 (0.5132)	
Want to work even if I have money	–0.1529 (0.5000)	–0.3923 (1.5579)	
Hours of job search	0.0031 (0.1340)	0.0033 (0.0839)	
Often take initiative to job search	–0.1014 (0.3840)	–0.0216 (0.0101)	
Hard to find alternative activities	–0.0564 (0.0735)	–0.2422 (0.5423)	
Hard to make the time pass	0.0546 (0.1147)	–0.4537 (3.6310)	
Mental well-being	0.0365** (9.4968)	0.0127 (0.5356)	
Marginal economic situation	0.6306*** (17.2127)	0.7133*** (11.5324)	
<i>Structural factors</i>			
Youth unemployed (Non-unemployed ref)			0.0839* (5.9195)
Unemployment duration (weeks)	0.0025** (8.6672)	0.0024* (4.7076)	0.0019*** (56.4942)
Age	–0.0232*** (15.5380)	–0.0134 (3.1078)	–0.0190*** (74.7746)
<i>Class</i>			
Non-skilled worker	1.2197** (7.7071)	2.4486** (8.1332)	0.8375*** (343.9965)
Skilled worker	1.1050* (6.2567)	2.6533** (9.7055)	0.7423*** (267.1716)
Lower white collar	0.8892* (3.8601)	2.2367** (6.7484)	0.7287*** (268.9447)
Self-employed	0.4869 (0.7396)	2.3158* (6.4279)	0.4690*** (70.0179)
Middle white collar (Higher white collar ref)	0.5118 (1.2196)	1.9039* (4.8420)	0.4009*** (86.9387)
<i>Ethnicity</i>			
Non-Scandinavian (Scandinavian ref)	0.7892** (9.5434)	0.6575* (4.0092)	0.2640*** (11.6650)
Unemployment rate	0.0678** (9.4500)	0.0343 (1.4071)	0.0585*** (204.2566)
Population (000s)	–0.0018** (6.8096)	–0.0019 (2.8547)	–0.0003** (7.5413)
N	1531	959	44609
Constant	–2.3369***	–4.0743***	–1.8685***
Chi-Square	139.165	72.921	1168.394

Note: The values cited are the coefficients of a *B-logit* regression, with *Wald* statistics in brackets.

*** = $p < 0.001$; ** = $p < 0.01$; * = $p < 0.05$.

^aLUP, ^bEPC

employment as often and actively as others. However, in terms of the questions concerning job-search activity there is no stable difference between the groups. The unemployed who have an unemployed partner and several unemployed friends look for jobs at the same rate as others.

Even when studying spare-time activities and the difficulty of finding alternative activities to employment, no significant relationship with concentration of unemployment is found. The results indicate that the unemployed with a close relationship to others who are also unemployed have about the same level of difficulty in finding meaningful spare-time activities and replacing the functions of employment as other unemployed people. This would not be the case if it is the development of alternative activities to employment that causes persistence in unemployment concentration.

When concentrating on the variables measuring well-being and economic situation one can see that both of these variables are significantly related to the proportion of unemployed friends, and that a respondent's economic situation is significantly related to their partner's labour-market status. However, the associations are not in the direction one would expect if concentration of unemployment is caused by a high level of adaptation to the unemployment situation. All of the significant relationships between unemployment concentration and the variables measuring well-being and economic situation are shown to be positive. This means that the existence of an unemployed partner and several unemployed friends is related to lower levels of well-being and economic prosperity. The results speak against the hypotheses that suggest that those with a large number of unemployed family members and friends have developed alternative survival strategies and are more adapted than others to the unemployment situation. This is not the case, at least concerning well-being and economic situation.

This section will deal with the relationship between the structural factors and unemployment concentration. Table 3 shows that there is a significant correlation between concentration of unemployment and the variables measuring labour-market status and duration of unemployment, even when controlling for other variables. It is more common that unemployed young people and young people with long periods in unemployment have

unemployed parents, than it is for the non-unemployed and short-time unemployed, even though the connection is weaker in the multivariate than in the bivariate analysis. Furthermore, it is more common to have an unemployed partner and several unemployed friends if one has had longer periods of unemployment than if one has been unemployed for only a few weeks. These correlations are as evident in the multivariate analysis as in the bivariate analysis.

Age is correlated with the risk of unemployment concentration in that lower age increases the probability of having several unemployed friends and an unemployed parent. In the case of partner's unemployment status, the correlation is significant only in the bivariate analyses. Two variables that prove to be strongly correlated with the risk of having a large number of unemployed friends, an unemployed partner, and an unemployed parent are ethnicity and class. It is more common that respondents born outside Scandinavia and with a working-class background are hit by concentration of unemployment, compared with Scandinavians and higher-grade white-collar workers.

Finally, Table 3 points to the importance of the structural factors – unemployment rate and population level in the district – when analysing the probability of having several unemployed friends, an unemployed partner, and at least one unemployed parent. Unemployment concentration is more frequent in rural areas and in districts with high unemployment rates, compared with urban areas and districts with low levels of unemployment, although the relationship concerning the risk of having an unemployed partner is not significant.

To sum up, there is no indication of an 'unemployment culture', with low commitment to work and easy adaptation to unemployment in groups with a high concentration of unemployment. On the contrary, it seems that people with an unemployed partner and several unemployed friends experience more difficulty than other unemployed people in adapting mentally and economically to the unemployment situation. This strengthens the theory that the concentration phenomenon is not caused by the existence of a 'culture of unemployment' in which unemployment is more or less the result of a voluntary choice. If this were the case, there would be a more positive atmosphere in groups with high

levels of unemployment concentration, and this would show up in Table 3. In contrast, the correlation between the variables measuring structural factors and the occurrence of concentration of unemployment within families and social networks proved to be strong. It is primarily the unemployed with long periods of unemployment, young persons, foreigners, and poorly educated people who live in rural areas with high levels of unemployment who are likely to experience concentration of unemployment.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to study the occurrence of unemployment concentration in Sweden and to map out possible explanations for the phenomenon. The conclusion is that unemployment tends to concentrate itself within families and social networks, in Sweden as well as in other Western societies. When analysing the variables associated with commitment to work and adaptability, there is no sign of an 'unemployment culture' characterized by an acceptance of unemployment, rejection of the work ethic, low commitment to employment, and the development of alternative activities and survival strategies in groups with high levels of unemployment. The results actually show that the unemployed with unemployed partners and friends find it harder than others to adapt to their unemployment situation. Furthermore, the data indicate that unemployment concentration affects categories of people who already have a marginal position in the labour market. It is primarily the young, non-Scandinavians, and those with low levels of education, who live in rural areas with high levels of unemployment who are at greatest risk of experiencing concentration of unemployment.

These results support the structural model of explanation for unemployment concentration, which maintains that the phenomenon is mainly due to factors connected to the structural position in life, and weakens the attitudinal model of explanation which argues that the concentration of employment is caused by negative values towards employment and a high adaptability to the unemployment situation. Measuring causality on the basis of cross-sectional data is admittedly somewhat

questionable. Further research based on longitudinal data could provide a stronger argument for such a causal relationship. Despite this weakness, however, the results presented in this article provide strong support for the structural model of explanation.

In the Western world, individuals regard themselves as members of society primarily through their participation in paid employment. Having a job is obviously a major form of social participation and a guarantee of different kinds of welfare benefits. This study shows that there are certain families and groups of people, who have a close relationship to each other, who are denied the opportunity to be full members of society, in that they do not have jobs. The fact that they have reduced contact with the working world increases their risk of entering or becoming stuck in social and economic poverty. This risk increases as a result of the stricter criteria for receiving unemployment benefit that have been proposed and implemented in Sweden in recent years. The consequence of this is that a considerable number of people – especially the poorly educated, the young, and immigrants – run the risk of ending up outside the unemployment insurance system. These are the same categories of people who, in this study, 'involuntarily' also run a high risk of being the victims of the phenomenon of concentrated unemployment.

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Manuscript received: October 1997.