

Disability in Individual Life and Past Society

Life-Course Perspectives of People with Disabilities in the
Sundsvall Region of Sweden in the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

What did a life with disability imply for individuals in a past society? Since disabled men and women have long been hidden in history, the aim with this thesis is to uncover them and their living conditions in nineteenth-century Sweden, represented by the Sundsvall region. The data consist of parish registers, which help to trace people's life courses and the consequences if disabilities interfered with their lives. These records are digitized and stored by the Demographic Data Base (DDB), Umeå University, Sweden. The dataset under analysis comprises a population of some 36,000 observations from non-disabled and disabled individuals. Life-course perspectives and labeling theories are applied in all four studies in this thesis, even if different methods and events in life are taken into account. Studies II and IV examine the marriage propensities and the spouses, and show that disabled people did marry, and usually with a non-disabled partner in similar age and from similar socio-economic origin. However their marital chances were significantly smaller compared to their non-disabled counterparts. Study I reveals that disabilities implied significantly higher death risks, in particular among the men and those with mental disabilities of both genders. In Study III, the three events of getting a job, marrying and giving birth to a child were explored in parallel. The results reveal that even if some disabled people experienced all these events, they did so to a lower extent than non-disabled persons. Variations were found between men and women and different disabilities. The major conclusion of the thesis is that disabled people constituted a most heterogeneous group of individuals with different obstacles and opportunities in life in a past society, where gender and type of disability seem to have played a part in their level of labeling beyond the impairment itself.

Keywords

disability, nineteenth century, marriage, mortality, partner selection, life course, event history analysis, sequence analysis, gender, Sweden

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