



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

FRÅN UNDANTAGSKONTRAKT TILL FOLKPENSION

Äldres försörjningsmönster under den ekonomiska omvandlingen i Västerbotten 1890–1955

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Abstract

The industrial breakthrough in Sweden during the late 19th and early 20th centuries implied a profound economic transformation. Employment in the primary sector declined relative to that in the secondary and tertiary sectors. A decreasing number of individuals were employed in crafts, sawmills, and paid domestic service, while an increasing number found employment in manufacturing, power industries, and urban service professions. Simultaneously, urbanisation and geographical mobility rose significantly. Despite this transformation being characterised by a substantial improvement in living standards—with real incomes among workers tripling within three decades—serious issues concerning the elderly became apparent by the mid-20th century. Many elderly people were dependent on poor relief and endured social hardships in care homes. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a deeper understanding of how the economic transformation from an agrarian to an industrial society influenced the livelihood patterns of the elderly. The study explores the livelihood of the elderly through the interplay between the market, the family, and the state. Deficiencies within these support systems are examined through the lens of poor relief support. The analysis focuses on Västerbotten County between 1890 and 1955—a period marked by particularly rapid transformation.

The findings indicate that elderly individuals became concentrated in stagnating sectors, such as the primary sector, crafts, and paid domestic service, whereas younger age groups were employed in higher-paid sectors such as manufacturing, mining, smelting industries, and the urban service sector. Consequently, the relative income and socio-economic status of the elderly declined in comparison to younger age groups during this period of transformation. The results also suggest that increased geographical mobility contributed to a reduction in the elderly's access to family members in rural areas. This access diminished as a growing proportion of children relocated to industrialising areas, although no such decline was observed in urban areas. Furthermore, the study reveals that elderly individuals who had been employed in stagnating sectors outside the primary sector faced a greater risk of becoming recipients of poor relief compared to those who had worked in expanding industries. Additionally, elderly individuals who had only children who had moved away faced approximately twice the risk of becoming recipients of poor relief compared to those with children who remained nearby. When the national pension that was introduced in 1948, ensured an adequate level of support, the risk of poor relief decreased for those with weak market and family support systems.

This study contributes to existing research by systematically and longitudinally examining the relationship between the market, the family, and the state, and the incidence of poor relief at an individual level. In contrast to previous studies, which predominantly adopt an urban focus and consist of cross-sectional analyses, this thesis provides insights into the processes that not only adversely affected the relative income of the elderly but also diminished their access to family members during the economic transformation. Additionally, it sheds light on how these factors influenced the elderly's reliance on poor relief.

Keywords

Livelihood, old age, poor relief, economic transformation, family, Sweden, migration, pension reforms, incomes, socioeconomic status, historical demography

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