Who becomes a teenage parent?
Life course perspectives on selection into teenage motherhood and fatherhood trajectories in Sweden

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Akademisk avhandling
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Abstract

Background. The aim of the research described in thesis is to study processes of selection leading to teenage parenthood in contemporary Sweden. I ask how factors related to socio-economic position, mental health issues in youth, and family formation behaviour of previous generations directs young individuals into teenage parent trajectories. Having children as a teenager is often seen as a burden and a failure, and framed as a public health concern. This is true, even as mounting evidence points to the fact that the connections between teenage parenthood and future adverse outcomes are muddled by selection effects. This research makes a contribution to the body of knowledge by looking at how several factors influence selection processes, namely socio-economic background factors, mental health issues in adolescence and family formation patterns of the teenage parent's own parents. Both teenage mothers and teenage fathers are considered from a life course perspective. The theoretical framework also draws on the literature relating to opportunity costs and competing alternatives.

Method. Two longitudinal data sources are utilized: register population data accessed through the Umeå SIMSAM lab and the Northern Swedish Cohort survey. In order to answer questions about both selection leading into events and trajectories, random intercept models for longitudinal data as well as sequence analysis are applied.

Results. The results show that, apart from confirming the continued importance of socio-economic factors selecting young men and women to become teenage parents and embark on teenage parenthood trajectories, mental health issues in youth are also important. Through this route, both teenage girls and boys enter into teenage parenthood in a way that does not happen with on-time parenthood. Furthermore, the results show that selection not only affects the chances of becoming a teenage parent, but also which type of teenage parent trajectory the individual follows. Moreover, the results reveal that these trajectories, and not only the event of becoming a teenage parent, are repeated over generations. The results illustrate that teenage parents are a heterogeneous group with diverse backgrounds and selection processes, and hence policy measures aimed at teenage parents should not try to offer blanket solutions.

Keywords
Teenage parenthood, life course, longitudinal, mental health, family, selection effects

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