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Abstract of paper proposal to the Fifth Annual Conference of Alter (European Society for Disability Research): Inclusion, Participation and Human Rights in Disability Research – Comparisons and Exchanges

Theme: Innovative Methods in Disability Research

Title, paper proposal: Tracing life trajectories using sequence analysis to identify how disabilities impacted on people's social inclusion in past society

This study traces the life trajectories among young individuals with and without disabilities who experienced the same historical environment (the 19th-century region of Sundsvall, Sweden). The aim is to explore whether and how their trajectories differed by disability and gender as regards vital events in life, such as taking up work, marrying and form a family. Such events are indicative for people's inclusion in social life and society, but there is poor knowledge about these issues in history. Disability studies show that disabilities limit individuals' chances to participate in today's labor market. Theoretical explanations suggest that this is not only due to the impairment itself, as perceptions about normalcy tend to render a stigma that promotes exclusion on the basis of disability. Having unique access to individual-level data (parish registers digitized by the Demographic Data Base, Umeå University, Sweden) enables us to test this theoretical notion historically by employing sequence analyses of 8,874 individual trajectories. The data allow observation over lifetime (here from 15 years of age until 33) and show the presence of disabilities. This helps to clarify if getting a job, finding a spouse to marry and form a family with were infrequent events due to disability. Our first results reveal that this was the case and indicate that a stigma added to make work and family less frequent among disabled individuals albeit some differences by type of disability and gender are found. The sequence analyses generate novel findings on how disabilities impacted on people's inclusion in past society, in providing a holistic picture that accounts for several events among a substantial number of cases. Only being able to conduct such analyses of individuals living 150-200 years ago makes our study innovative, as quantitative methods are under-used in both disability studies and social history.

Keywords: sequence analysis; disability; gender; history; quantitative methods; life trajectory

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