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This paper discusses the underlying causes behind the masculinization of poverty during the period of 1957–1981 in Sweden. Testable hypotheses are derived from a theoretical framework. The findings suggest that the male role as breadwinner disappeared during the analysed period. Lowly educated men and especially male immigrant labour lost their labour market position when industrial society gave way to a new post-industrial society, with an expanding service sector bringing numerous new employment opportunities for women. When sick or unemployed, social assistance was the only social security these men had available. On the other hand, the welfare-state expansion targeted women, particularly single mothers and widows, and thus reduced the number of native women claiming social assistance. The findings also point to the process character of the masculinization of poverty, arguing that women gained significantly more than men from the expansion of the welfare state.

Keywords Sweden, poverty, masculinity, gender, immigration, welfare state

Introduction
The period 1957–1981 was an eventful time in Swedish history, during which the expansion of the welfare state took place. The pension system was first reformed in 1948 with a supplementary pension (ATP) added in 1960. The result was that most pensioners could live on their pensions without the need for social assistance. Furthermore, elderly care was removed from the jurisdiction of the social-assistance administration in 1947 and implemented in 1951–1952. The result of these reforms was a significant decrease in the number of pensioners receiving social assistance during the early 1950s.

A major social insurance reform took place in 1962 (lag om allmän försäkring). Sickness insurance, pensions and work-injury insurance became universal, and were financed and provided by the public sector. These reforms also reduced the number of persons dependent on social assistance. The health-care, educational
and social sectors expanded and went through major institutional changes during the period of 1957–1981, and, overall, these changes not only improved the welfare of the population but also generated a demand for labour, especially female labour.

A second important characteristic of the studied period is that the period of robust economic growth that was seen during the 1950s and 1960s was stunted by severe economic crises in 1971–1972, 1973–1974 and 1977–1978. The service sector (especially the public sector) started to expand in the mid-1960s, and by the 1970s had become the engine of the Swedish economy. This shift was amplified by the fact that several branches of the industrial sector went into decline during this period due to increasing international competition. These included shipyards, manufacturing, clothing, steel and forestry-related sectors. The transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy took place during the 1970s.

Labour-market policy changed at the end of the 1950s in order to stimulate and facilitate economic growth. However, in the 1960s the economy became overheated. This period also saw a huge reallocation of labour within Sweden, increasing inflation and a rise in unemployment in marginalized groups (elderly, disabled et cetera). Regional policy incentives were developed to try to smooth the negative effects in the most disadvantaged regions. In the 1970s the municipal service sector expanded significantly and offered employment, although generally for women. In Sweden, the female employment rate became one of the highest in the world. During the 1970s however, unemployment continued to rise, particularly in the declining industrial sectors, and despite government subsidies being given to several sectors to keep unemployment down.

The labour immigration policy for non-Nordic citizens was abolished in 1967, and by 1975 only a few Nordic labour immigrants were seen to be coming to Sweden. Here, the declining demand for immigrant labour related to the overall decline of the Swedish industrial sector. Since the late 1960s, the number of refugees accepted to Sweden began to increase, and during the 1970s refugees were more numerous than labour immigrants.

The studied period also witnessed substantial changes in the population structure with regard to family structure and civil status. While the 1950s was characterized by a traditional nuclear family structure, often with a housewife, the 1970s saw sharp increases in rates of divorce and also increases in single-person households. Additionally, the baby-boom of the 1960s was replaced by a bust in the number of births in the 1970s.

The period 1957–1981 depicts a society in transformation, and as this process is multidimensional it is also likely to impact on those in receipt of social assistance. The pension reform of 1948 and removing elderly care from the social-assistance administration meant a shift in the age-structure of those receiving social assistance, ranging from pensioners to young adults (16–29). A shift can also be seen from the majority of the recipients living in the countryside during the 1950s, to a majority living in towns and cities from the 1960s. Lastly, the number of social-assistance recipients with an immigrant background can be seen to increase during the analysed period.

The analysed period neatly overlaps with the 1956 Social Help Act which was in effect during the period of 1957–1981. This act was more generous than the 1918 Poor Relief Act, but far less generous than the 1980 Social Assistance Act which
followed it (see Table 1). The generosity of the social-assistance regime may also influence how many recipients qualify for support.

The expansion of the Swedish welfare state helped to combat female poverty more than male poverty because a larger share of public consumption and the public transfers that were made targeted women. Gunnarsson concludes that: ‘Seen in a Swedish context it is difficult to find support for the hypothesis that there has been a feminization of poverty during the last decades.’ Although a process of masculinizing poverty in Sweden was already detectable in the 1960’s, no analysis of it has been made as the focus tended to be on single mothers and older women.

The relative share of men among the recipients of social assistance has increased in Sweden since the mid-1960s (see Figure 1), and is related to the increased share of immigrants in the Swedish population. Previous studies have shown that immigrants
have been over-represented as recipients of social assistance in Sweden during the 1950s and 1960s, but not the link to gender. However, Figure 1 raises some doubt as to whether the increase began in the mid-1960s or as early as 1960. Nevertheless, the causes behind this process of masculinization require further exploration. The aim of this paper is to discuss the underlying causes behind the masculinization of poverty during the period of 1957–1981. The study puts forward the following questions: (1) Why did more men than women become dependent on social assistance? (2) When did more men than women become dependent on social assistance? (3) Is it men in general, or sub-groups defined by age, ethnicity etc. and so on, that have increased the share of men among those in receipt of social assistance?

In this study, the number of recipients of social assistance is chosen as a proxy variable for poverty. It is difficult to claim that one measurement is better than another as they simply display different aspects of reality. The income data before 1970 is poor, and it takes until 1981 before the data is good enough for use as an indirect measurement for relative poverty. As the investigated period precedes 1981 we have chosen the number of recipients of social assistance as a proxy variable, as the historical data is good and reliable. However, we will most likely underestimate poverty using this measurement as many who fall below the social-assistance norm will not apply for social assistance for various reasons.

**What do we know about the masculinization of poverty?**

Although a masculinization of poverty in Sweden was detected as early as the 1960s, it has not been analysed. The Social Assistance Survey 1968 identified that men had increased among the recipients of social assistance since 1965, and were in the majority in 1968. Especially, young foreign-born, men were over-represented amongst the recipients of social assistance. Walter Korpi also notes the rapid increase in the share of single men without children among the recipients of social assistance between 1965–1969, but no explanation for the development is offered. It is assumed that problems of becoming
established in the labour market are an underlying cause of this higher need for social assistance. According to Jan Nasenius, in Sweden these problems are higher for non-Nordic than Nordic citizens. It can be seen that most of these immigrants have only been in Sweden for a relatively short period of time, they have shorter periods of support, and the paid-out support they obtain is lower than that provided for natives. The share of foreigners dependent on social assistance (especially foreign men) increased in Sweden since the mid-1960s, and among other Nordic citizens, an increased incidence of unemployment appeared to be the primary cause. Björn Gustafsson concludes in his study that non-Nordic immigrants without residency rights, unemployment insurance and a non-entitlement to pension payments in Sweden created an increased demand for social assistance. Later studies have confirmed these findings, and a change in the labour market during 1960 to 1990 from a demand for low-skilled labour to a demand for high-skilled labour, has mainly affected immigrants.

Since the 1970s, international social research considers poverty as a predominantly female issue. Increases in female poverty rates relate to the emergence of new family patterns, including later-in-life marriages, increased divorce rates, and a higher incidence of single mothers. Higher female poverty rates also correlate with the new economy, with an increased rate of female participation in the labour market. Different scholars have highlighted the issue from different perspectives, but the essence of each argument is that women represent a disproportionate percentage of the world’s poor, and that women in poverty have increased as a global group.

The debate on the feminization of poverty focuses primarily on single mothers and on how the labour market discriminated against women. Older women were largely omitted from the Anglo-American dominated analyses of the feminization of poverty, but studies focusing on Europe and the EU did not show the same findings. Although there is little direct empirical evidence, the period analysed in Sweden in this study is perceived as one of a feminization of poverty.

With one exception, the Swedish debate on a masculinization of poverty is absent. The findings of Lovisa Broström’s PhD thesis indicates a process of masculinization of poverty since the late 1960s, but, again, no analysis of the causes is made. The international debate identifies a masculinization of poverty stemming from the 1990s. Susan Faludi argues that men have attempted to live up to the expectations of masculinity after the Second World War in America, only to find society not living up to its end of the bargain. Globalization, economic pressure and downsizing have made it difficult for men to live up to their expected role as providers, and American men have lost their economic role and also their self-esteem. According to Keith Nurse, women have achieved significant economic gains because of the changes in the sexual division of labour in the global economy. Aside from these publications, there has not been any larger academic debate about the masculinization of poverty. However, the phenomenon has been mentioned in studies about countries where a masculinity of poverty has existed for shorter periods. The pattern seen in these articles is much the same, and with economic slowdowns and traditional industrial-manufacturing jobs being outsourced to countries with lower wage costs, traditional male jobs have disappeared while traditional female jobs in care and service remain.
Economic structural change and its gender implications

Several economic and demographic processes have interacted in the 20th century in Sweden, resulting in fundamental changes in welfare and in the standard of living. (1) During the 20th century we have experienced significant demographic change. In the early part of the century there were few elderly people and many children; however, by the end of the century the relative proportion of the elderly population to children was about the same (roughly 20% of the population). (2) Women have migrated from domestic work and entered the regular labour market. In international comparison, Swedish women have enjoyed significantly more economic freedom and a higher standard of living than can be seen elsewhere. (3) The emergence of a post-industrial society has seen a shift away from industry and manufacturing towards a service-oriented production. While men were seen as the breadwinners in industrial society, women have entered the services of care-provision, education etc and so on – services that now occupy a significant share of the current labour force. (4) In this paper, we argue that there is actually a fourth economic–demographic process in motion in 20th-century Sweden. From being an ethnically homogeneous country prior to the Second World War II, Sweden has now become an ethnically heterogeneous country. Refugee influx, labour migration, marriage migration and family reunions have all contributed to this development.

These four processes are intertwined in a complex way, and they have a significant impact on welfare and on the standard of living. The demographic changes and the fact that women (especially married women) left domestic work offer two explanatory factors that cut both ways. Due to demographic changes which saw fewer children being born, it was easier for women to enter the regular labour market since their parental responsibilities decreased. Moreover, given the new labour opportunities available, the opportunity cost for the household rose, which probably affected the total number of children in the households. These two factors are therefore closely related, and together opened up new opportunities for women who were no longer as tied to childcare or household work as before.

According to the theory of structural economic cycles, the economy passes through two phases in a structural cycle: a period of change, in which new growth patterns based upon new technology emerge; and a period of rationalization, in which the use of the new technology spreads throughout the economy. During historic periods of change, male-dominated professions have traditionally expanded most, while women have benefitted in employment terms during periods of rationalization. During periods of rationalization, the relative incomes of women can be seen to rise. The increasing relative incomes of women promote changes in gender roles and facilitate greater economic freedom for women. The expansion of the welfare state during the 1960s and 1970s, and also its huge demand for female labour, occurred during a period of rationalization. Simultaneously, the demand for male labour in traditional manufacturing industry based on a Fordist production model, declined. The Swedish economy experienced periods of rationalization between 1951–1955 and 1975–1980, and during rationalization, the economic situation for women will significantly improve, while the economic situation for men will be negatively affected.
According to Faludi, American men have tried to live up to post-Second World War II expectations of masculinity. By the 1990s however, this was proving increasingly difficult as globalization, downsizing and other economic pressures made it ever more difficult for men to act as the primary economic providers for their families. As traditional masculinity continues to collapse, the once-valued male attributes of craft, loyalty and social utility are no longer honoured, much less rewarded.

The same underlying process is described by Ohlsson and Schön. When the economy has undergone such massive change from being an industrial economy to a service economy – somebody will win (women) and somebody will lose (men). The expanding service sector in Sweden spurred a demand for female labour, while the declining industrial sector demanded less and less male labour. This process appears to have started much earlier in Sweden than in the USA. The expansion of the welfare state in Sweden has been of greater benefit to women than men, partly because it provided employment opportunities primarily to women. An increased demand for female labour during the 1950s and 1960s has been noted in previous research, as has the subsequent rise in female relative wage rates.

It is worth making two points here, neither of which could be seen as controversial. Firstly, when an economic sector that has traditionally supported male employment declines, this will lead to higher rates of unemployment among men. Secondly, although there is a social-security net – in Sweden and in other countries that have experienced the transition to a post-industrial economy – long-term unemployment, irrespective of gender, will erode that person’s place in the social hierarchy. At a certain point, savings and other resources will be used up, and the individual will have to apply for social assistance. If more men than women lose their jobs and the prospects of finding a new job remain low, then more men than women will become recipients of social assistance.

This leads us to look at who has the most trouble becoming established on the labour market: namely immigrants, young adults and especially young men with little education. In line with the reasoning of Becker, young men with little education who are unemployed are most likely to remain single, while well-educated men who successfully establish themselves on the labour market at an early stage are those who tend to get married first. By amalgamating the arguments of Becker and Ohlsson, it is possible to argue that young men with a relatively low level of education but with valuable ‘industrial-era’ labour-market skills (and thus who were also attractive as breadwinners for family formation) suddenly found themselves unattractive in terms of both the labour market and the prospective marriage market.

Given this line of discussion, four hypotheses can be formulated for testing. If changes in the economic structure lead to a significantly higher demand for female rather than male labour, we can expect the following things to happen, either immediately or with a time lag: Hypothesis 1 – more men than women will have to apply for social assistance; Hypothesis 2 – the duration (months) of social assistance will be longer for men than for women; Hypothesis 3 – the gender-specific expenditures of social assistance will be higher for men than for women; Hypothesis 4 – the share of single men among the recipients of social assistance will be higher than the share of single women.

This theoretical discussion focuses on structural aspects and suggests that men (especially young men) will be the losers and women will be the winners in the transition of the Swedish economy.
Method and data
The aim of this study and its research questions will be operationalized using a hypothetico-deductive approach. A hypothesis, deduced from theory, will be constructed and tested empirically. The tested hypothesis contains propositions on the causality between two phenomena and what this causality looks like. This hypothesis is usually called the alternative hypothesis. The zero hypothesis is the negation of the alternative hypothesis, that is, there is no causality between the two studied phenomena. The hypothesis is then tested empirically. The deductive method is used in several disciplines, while the hypothetico-deductive method is primarily used in quantitative studies. However, there is nothing to prevent the use of such a quantitative approach in areas predominantly analysed with qualitative methods, and vice versa.

Until 1968, social assistance could be offered in more forms than just cash support. In this paper, only the recipients of cash support are analysed and not those receiving institutional or other forms of support. The empirical data is collected from the annually published official statistics on social assistance, and to some extent on major surveys produced by the Royal Board of Social Welfare.

This paper analyses the period of 1957 to 1981. This can be considered as a transitional period. The analysed years cover the period under which social assistance was provided in line with the 1956 Social Help Act, that is, it is the period between the restrictive 1918 Poor Relief Act and the generous 1980 Social Assistance Act. By delimiting the studied period to 1957 and 1981, methodological difficulties in respect of a changing legislative framework generating an institutional bias are avoided. During the analysed period, women left domestic work and entered the regular labour market. In the 1960s, married women in particular entered the regular labour market. During the 1960s, the service sector exceeded the industrial sector for the first time in both the number of those employed and in production value. As such, the analysed period can be seen as the breakthrough period of the post-industrial service society. During 1957–1981, the Swedish welfare state was significantly expanded, with increases in the provision of such things as pensions and kindergartens, improved health insurance and parental leave. Many of these developments primarily improved the situation of women, either as single parents, pensioners or widows who had previously been highly susceptible to falling into poverty. Over time, these groups have become ever more embedded in the welfare state. The ‘cradle to grave’ welfare state also facilitated a more normal and ordered life where chaotic periods of poverty had once been prevalent. While the importation of labour during the 1950s aimed at recruiting skilled workers as a complementary labour force, the labour imported in the 1960s was low skilled and designed primarily to fill vacancies for ‘3D-jobs’ (dirty, dangerous and demeaning). In the 1970s, the immigration of refugees to Sweden really took off. At the same time and even more so in the 1980s, it became increasingly difficult for immigrants to enter successfully the labour market successfully, partly because the demand for the type of labour they offered had disappeared.

A statistical overview
During the analysed period, several significant changes occurred regarding the household structure of recipients of social assistance. The share of couples with children halved between
1955 and 1985, dropping from 23% to 14% of those households receiving social assistance during the period (see Table 2). Regarding the household type, single women without children declined from 27% to 22% between 1955 and 1985 in terms of its share of supported households, whereas the share of single men without children increased from 23% to 39% during the same period. Furthermore, the share of single men with children increased by 100% (from 1% to 2%) between 1955 and 1985, while the share of single women with children increased by 36% (from 14% to 19%). In 1955, approximately 41% of the households receiving social assistance contained women, with or without children. The corresponding share of single men (with or without children) reached 24%. In 1985, the share of households with single women (with or without children) was 41%, and the corresponding share for men was also 41%. The share of households’ of men (with or without children)

### Table 2. Social assistance by household type 1955–1985 (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single women</th>
<th></th>
<th>Single men</th>
<th></th>
<th>Couples</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Without children</td>
<td>With children</td>
<td>Without children</td>
<td>With children</td>
<td>Without children</td>
<td>With children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>0*</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0*</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In the official statistics there are too few observations for this household type to be listed.

Source: SOS Fattigvård, SOS Socialvård, SOS Socialhjälp and SOS Socialtjänst.

### Table 3. Average duration (months) of social assistance by household type 1955–1985.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single women</th>
<th></th>
<th>Single men</th>
<th></th>
<th>Couples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Without children</td>
<td>With children</td>
<td>Without children</td>
<td>With children</td>
<td>Without children</td>
<td>With children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>7.1 a/6.6 b</td>
<td>7.0 a/6.1 b</td>
<td>4.3 a/3.3 b</td>
<td>4.6 a/5.0 b</td>
<td>5.6 a/4.3 b</td>
<td>4.7 a/4.2 b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a* Countrieside  
*b* Cities

Source: SOS Fattigvård, SOS Socialvård, SOS Socialhjälp and S33 SM 8602.
receiving social assistance doubled over a period of 30 years, while the corresponding share of women remained more or less unchanged.

The number of months with social assistance also changed during the investigated period (Table 3). Single men without children living in cities drew on social assistance on average for 3.3 months in 1955, and in 1985 the duration had increased to 4.1 months. Single women without children in cities received social assistance for 6.6 months in 1955, but by 1985 this had decreased to 3.9 months. The duration of social assistance for single women with children also decreased between 1955 and 1985. For single men without children the changes were marginal.

It is also worth noting that households of couples without children saw a reduction in the number of months with social assistance over the period 1955–1985, but couples with children displayed marginal changes during the same period (from 4.7 [countryside]/4.2 [cities] months in 1955 to 4.6 months in 1985).

The average annual experience of social assistance by household type is illustrated in Table 4. Here, single women with children display higher expenditures than single men with children throughout the analysed period. However, single men without children overtook single women without children between 1970 and 1975 in regard to social assistance expenditures. The significantly higher expenditures per household type seen in 1985 compared to 1980 are related to the 1980 Social Assistance Act, which was implemented in 1982. The significantly lower expenditures in 1955 compared to 1960 are related to the 1956 Social Help Act that replaced the 1918 Poor Relief Act in 1957 (see Table 1).

**Analysis**

Hypothesis 1 posed that more men than women will have to apply for social assistance. Figure 1 illustrates clearly that men have constituted the majority of social-assistance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4. Average annual expenditures for social assistance by household type 1955–1985 (SEK, fixed prices [1985]).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955 987*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960 4829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965 4165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970 5286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975 5285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980 6391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985 8961</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The official statistics only contain information on expenditures for adults, with no information for children.

Source: SOS Fattigvård, SOS Socialvård, SOS Socialhjälp and S33 SM 8602.
recipients from 1968 onwards. Starting in 1960, the same diagram demonstrates an increasing trend in the share of men receiving social assistance, with a rather more rapid increase seen from 1966 onwards. Consequently, the first hypothesis is found to be true from 1968, but false for the period prior to 1968.

This finding is not surprising. That the share of men among recipients of social assistance exceeded that of women during the second half of the 1960s has been previously identified, although the research has mainly addressed poverty as being a predominantly female problem. The theoretical framework presented above offers an explanation as to why this change has occurred: women have benefitted more from the welfare state than men, which in turn reduced their relative share among recipients of social assistance.

Hypothesis 2 posed that the duration (months) of social assistance will be longer for men than for women (see Table 3). The average duration in months of social assistance for single women without children dropped from 7.1 (countryside)/6.6 (cities) in 1955 to 3.9 months in 1985. The corresponding average months of duration for single men without children went from 4.3 (countryside)/3.3 (cities) in 1955 to 4.1 months in 1985. While single women without children have experienced a significant reduction in the average number of months spent in receipt of assistance, single men without children have generally experienced only marginal changes in the average months spent in receipt of assistance.

Both single women and single men with children have however experienced a downward trend, leading to shorter durations of social assistance. For single women with children this average period dropped from 7.0 (countryside)/6.1 (cities) months in 1955 to 4.6 in 1985. The corresponding average duration of assistance for single men with children went from 4.6 (countryside)/5.0 (cities) in 1955 to 4.0 months in 1985. It is also worth noting that the group of single men with children constituted about 1% per cent of all household types during the investigated period. Hence, due to the small size of this group, the conclusions on single men with children are not likely to be particularly robust.

Throughout the investigated period, single men without children have experienced a rise in the average duration of months on assistance, while single women without children have experienced a decline. The conclusion in respect of the duration (in months) on social assistance is that hypothesis 2 is true for the latter years of investigation, and only for single people without children.

This finding must be considered in relation to the fact that very little research has been conducted on the duration of poverty, measured in the number of months spent on social assistance. In line with the theoretical framework, it is likely that single women have generally experienced short periods of dependence on social assistance although they have benefitted relatively more from the welfare state than men.

Hypothesis 3 posed that the gender-specific expenditures of social assistance will be higher for men than for women. These expenditures are displayed in Table 4. Until the mid-1970s the gender-specific expenditure on social assistance was higher for single women without children than for single men without children. In 1975 this situation changed
and the gender-specific expenditure on social assistance became higher for single men without children than for single women without children.

It is not possible to analyse gender-specific expenditure for single adults with children as single men with children constitutes only about 1% per cent during the studied period. For single adults with children the result is inconclusive. For single adults without children, hypothesis 3 is true for the period after 1975, but false for the period prior up to 1975.

The annual average expenditure on social assistance is a function of the poverty norm, reflecting the duration of support in months, the number of recipients, and the extent to which the recipients require social assistance as an income supplement or as the only source of income. A separate poverty norm for men and women was not applied in Sweden, and the norm was the same for both genders during this period. In addition, no information is available on differences by gender in the need for social assistance as an income supplement or as the sole source of income. The annual average expenditure on social assistance would then be determined by the number of recipients and the duration in months on social assistance. As shown above, men exceeded women among recipients during the 1960s in both relative and absolute numbers, and while the duration on social assistance decreased significantly from 1960 to 1980 for single women without children, a small increase in the average duration period was observed for single men without children for the same period. Hence, the annual average expenditure on social assistance for single men without children exceeds that for single women without children. In this particular case, the tipping point occurred in the mid-1970s.

Hypothesis 4 poses that the share of single men among the recipients of social assistance will be higher than the share of single women. Already in 1960, single men without children exceeded single women without children: 26.2% for men and 23.7% for women (Table 2). Since then, the share of single women without children receiving social assistance decreased to 18% by 1980, and during the same period the share of single men without children increased to 39%. Hypothesis 4 is therefore true for the entire period.

Already in the Social Assistance Survey of 1968, it was noted that the share of single men without children exceeded the share of single women without children among recipients of social assistance. This is also noted by Korpi and in the Social Assistance Survey 1968. Neither however made any attempt to analyse the reasons for this phenomenon. The theoretical framework presented here offers an explanation. The emergence of the post-industrial society increased the demand for female labour, and decreased the demand for male labour. Simultaneously the emerging welfare state took over some of the functions which the household previously produced, and this enabled women to enter the general labour market. More often than not, they undertook jobs in the public sector. As Ohlsson and Stanfors argue, the social transfers and welfare schemes that emerged undoubtedly targeted women to a larger extent than men during this period. Men worked in the declining industrial sector, and, consequently, such welfare arrangements have had an impact on gender-specific poverty. The outcome of this process has also been discussed by Faludi.
Discussion
The share of men as recipients of social assistance has increased throughout the entire studied period, with the exception of the three first years. In 1968, men can be seen to form the majority of the recipients. In the mid-1970s, the annual average expenditure of social assistance for single men without children exceeded the annual average expenditure of social assistance for single women without children. Furthermore, while single women without children experienced a decreasing trend in terms of the duration of months they spent on social assistance, single men without children experienced only marginal changes. The conclusion is that the period of 1960 to –1980 constitutes a process of masculinization of poverty in Sweden. Although the start of this process in the 1960s has been identified, its causes have hitherto not been analysed.\(^79\)

This paper links the process of the masculinization of poverty to the significant economic demographic changes which occurred during the analysed period. The 25% reduction in the number of single women without children between 1969 and 1980 contrasts significantly with the 50% increase in respect of single men without children during the same period, and this can be explained by the theoretical framework. While women were in the majority among immigrants to Sweden for most of the period of 1945–1960,\(^80\) men were in the majority among immigrants after this period. These male immigrants came to take up jobs in the declining industrial sector,\(^81\) but subsequently faced problems in establishing themselves in the labour market\(^82\) and as well as also in the social-insurance system.\(^83\) This increased the demand for social assistance among immigrants\(^84\) and subsequently the share of immigrants among the recipients of social assistance increased.\(^85\) Relatedly, the share of foreign-born men dependent on social assistance increased at an even faster rate during the period of 1967–1983.\(^86\)

Salonen also notes that among those receiving social assistance, the share of foreign-born citizens has increased since 1964, but offers no explanation for this. According to him, the increase seen during the 1970s is related to the rising number of

\[\text{FIGURE 2} \quad \text{Head of household aged 16–29 (%), total and foreign citizens 1964–1981.} \]

*Source: SOS Socialvård*
refugees, and he concludes that the need for social assistance has moved from a relatively ethnically homogeneous group of recipients to a more heterogeneous group.

Figure 2 displays the percentage head of household percentage for the age-group 16–29, in total and for foreign-born citizens, 1964–1981. Except for one single year (1978), the share of foreign-born citizens was significantly higher for this age-group than the corresponding share of the total heads of households. This finding has a theoretical implication of relevance to this study. Ohlsson argued that three economic-demographic processes have occurred during the 20th century, yet the finding here indicates that there may actually be a fourth economic-demographic process: since the Second World War II, Sweden has been a country of immigration. The population is no longer ethnically homogeneous, and seen from this perspective it is also very likely that the recipients of social assistance have become ethnically heterogeneous.

The expansion of the service sector leads to increased employment possibilities for women, and hence to their inclusion in the social-insurance system. The demand for female labour in the expanding service sector was significant during the period of 1965–1980, especially in the areas of child and elderly care. Thus, it is clear that rising employment opportunities for women eventually leads to better protection for women in the social-insurance system in relation to sickness, unemployment and the ability to obtain a ‘liveable’ retirement pension. We can therefore expect to see a reduction in the number of women seeking social assistance, and the data on the household structure of recipients supports this argument.

The decline of the industrial sector has also had consequences for the gender structure of those receiving social assistance. The relatively low-skilled male workforce lost their jobs and the service sector required competences and skills that these men could not supply. The scientific literature reports that immigrant men failed to establish themselves in the social-insurance system, and thus had to rely on social assistance, mainly when sick or unemployed. This conclusion is borne out in official reports (that is, the 1968 Social Help Survey). The immigrant workers took up poorly paid jobs (often with insecure employment conditions) that natives did not want to undertake. It is therefore more likely that this labour group would display a higher dependency on social assistance than other groups due to poorly paid jobs, insecure employment conditions and the character of these ‘3D-jobs’, rather than because of their immigrant backgrounds.

The expansion of the public sector may have created something of a ‘statistical illusion’, leading to the question of whether the increasing number of men receiving social assistance depends only on the decline of the industrial sector and these men’s inability to provide the skills required by the new expanding service sector. We have to bear in mind that the reduction in the number of single women on social assistance is related to the fact that elderly care was removed from local authority control as a part of the overall changes made in respect of poor relief, and labour-market participation has also granted greater access to pensions making it possible for elderly widows to live on their pensions without the need for economic assistance as an income complement. The share of single women without children as recipients of economic assistance in Sweden dropped from 38.5% in 1945 to 21% in 1970. Simultaneously, the share of single men without children increased from 19.5% in 1945 to 34% in 1970. The share of (native) women dropped 17.5 percentage points units and the share of (immigrant) men increased by 14.5 percentage points units.
during the period covered by this paper. However, a part of the relative increase in respect of immigrant men may actually depend on the absolute decrease of native women as recipients of social assistance between 1945 and 1970.

Concluding remarks

The Swedish welfare state has sought to improve continuously improve the economic position of its citizens since the Second World War II. These improvements have particularly benefitted women. Sweden features as a highly developed county with one of the most extensive welfare states during the period of investigation. Sweden also differs from most other countries due to it having one of the highest female labour-participation rates in the world. Instead, we focus on how structural factors have changed gender roles when it comes to poverty.

This paper has looked to discuss the underlying causes behind the masculinisation of poverty during the period 1957–1981. Emergent is that more men than women became dependent on social assistance, and this is related to the significant economic-demographic processes which are taking place in post-Second World War Sweden. A significant reduction in fertility rates occurred, significantly changing the role of women. As women have left domestic work – partly in conjunction with this lower fertility rate – they have tended to take up jobs in the public sector, and this coincides with the emergence of a post-industrial society with a dominant service sector. The elderly and child care, previously produced by women in the domestic sector, is now being produced by women in the public sector. Furthermore, as women entered the labour market they increasingly qualified for social insurance as opposed to having to rely on social assistance. Wage labour and their progressive inclusion in the social insurance system have led to an increasing economic freedom for women as they are no longer economically dependent on their husbands. As a final element, the reform of the pension system provided all residents with a minimum pension they could live on, and so moved widows with no economic resources out of poverty. Younger women working for a salary outside the domestic sector were included for the first time in the social-insurance system, and could now also qualify for a higher pension. Such processes logically lead to a reduced female dependence on social assistance.

The male role as a breadwinner progressively disappeared over the analysed period. Men with little or no education (particularly male immigrant labour) lost their labour-market position as the industrial society gave way to a post-industrial society with its expanding service sector and plenty of employment possibilities for women. Again, the subsequent increase in male dependence on social assistance appears to be a logical outcome of this process.

The masculinization of poverty in Sweden should be seen as a developing process beginning from the start of the 1960s and continuing through to the end of the 1970s. The share of men as recipients of social assistance increased from 1960 to 1977, with men becoming majority recipients as early as 1968. Changes in the household structures of recipients can be observed during the period 1955–1980, where single men without children increased from 26% to 39% per cent while single women without children decreased from 24% to 18% per cent. While women experienced a decreasing average duration of poverty with social assistance, men experienced only marginal changes. The average annual expenditure on social assistance by household type also
changed, with expenditure for *single men without children* exceeding that for *single women without children* by the mid-1970s. As we cannot yet observe a distinctive breakpoint, at this stage, it is perhaps more appropriate to talk about a *process* of masculinzsation.

The findings indicate that the increase in the number of men among those receiving social assistance during the analysed period is related to increases in labour immigrants and refugees. During the 1970s, refugees caused the overall share of men to increase even further. Both labour immigrants and refugees were seen to have problems in establishing themselves in the labour market (if they did succeed it was usually in low-paid and insecure jobs), and also in the social-insurance system. When sick or unemployed, social assistance offered the only social security to which these men had access. It must however be noted that the number of immigrant men alone did not push the share of men receiving social assistance upwards, and welfare measures targeting women (for example, single mothers and widows) reduced the number of native women claiming social assistance, thus exacerbating the balance still further.

The analysis highlights the disturbing fact that so little research has been undertaken on the structures (for example, the characteristics of the household structure, age, sex, ethnicity etc and so on.) of those receiving social assistance during the period of 1957–1981. The number of studies focusing on the duration of social-assistance support is precisely zero, and there is a similar lack of studies on the changing household structure of social-assistance recipients and the changing expenditure levels for various groups. As such, there is a significant knowledge gap waiting to be filled by future research on the recipients of social assistance during the high period of Swedish welfare-state expansion.

The results of this study show that the long-established discourse surrounding the ‘feminizsation of poverty’ has no empirical support in the context of Sweden. On the contrary, during the Swedish welfare state’s most expansive period, it was in fact women who were generally able to improve their relative economic situation, and during the same period, some men began to fall behind. Against this backdrop, it can be clearly seen that the development of the post-war economy and the social democratic welfare state has without doubt benefitted women more than men.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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