

Could Denmark afford to  
let the illegitimate children  
among the poor people  
live?

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# Illegitimacy and infant mortality in nineteenth century Denmark

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- Description
  - Levels and trends
- Functional analysis – How was who killed
  - Juridical and social illegitimacy
  - Cultures of infant feeding
  - Unintended effects of poor relief administration
- Interventions to reduce the excess mortality
  - The Royal Maternity Hospital 1750-
  - Registration of stillbirths
  - The 1803 poor law
  - The battle for registration of excess mortality
  - The movement of honorable men
- Conclusions

# Births out of wedlock per 100 births

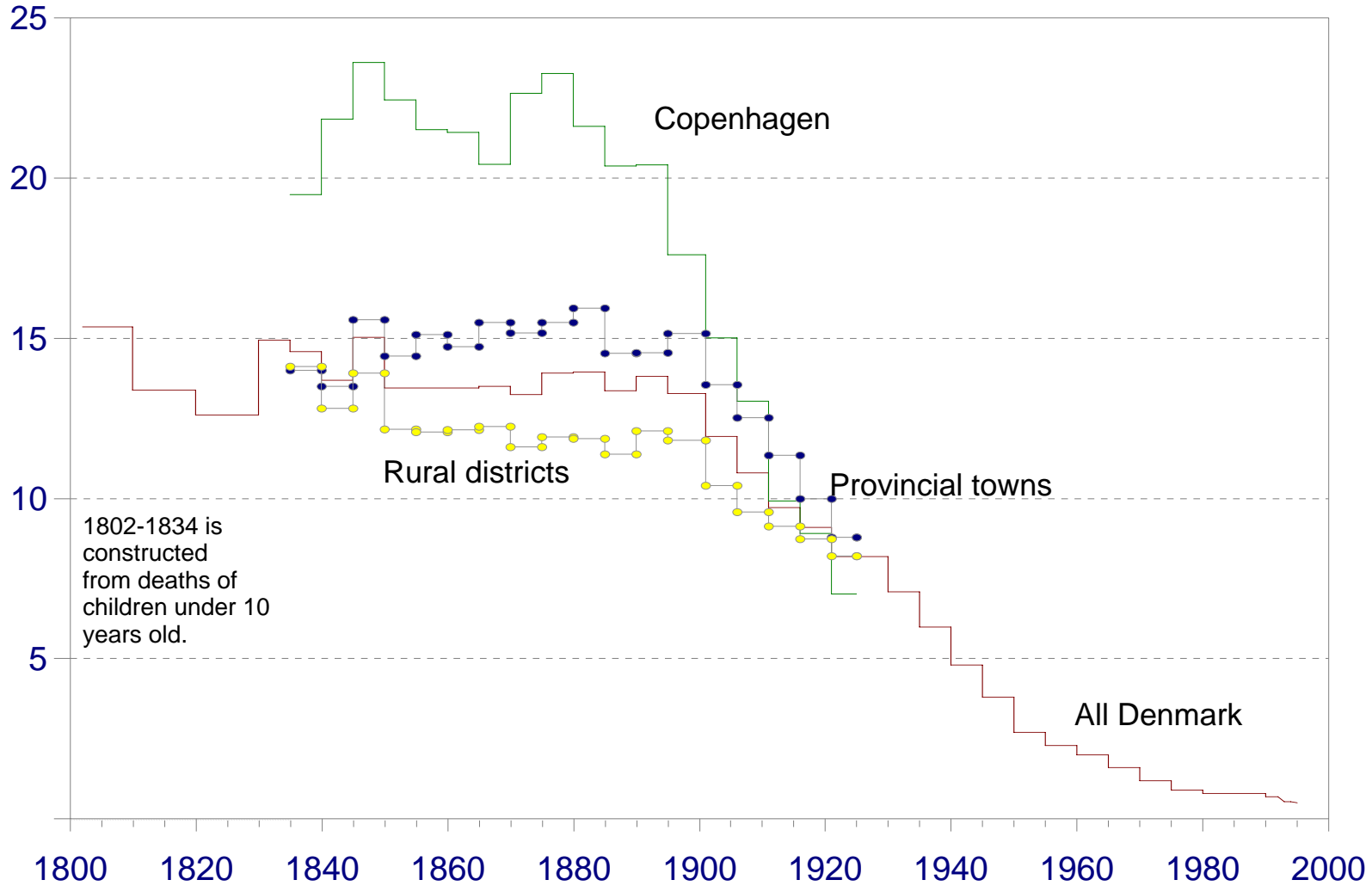
	Copen- hagen	Provencial towns	Rural districts	All country
1801-09	26,0			7,4
1810-19	23,1			8,9
1820-29	23,4			8,6
1830-39	24,1			9,8
1840-49	22,0	12,8	10,1	11,5
1850-59	21,8	10,9	9,7	11,1
1860-69	21,8	10,9	9,7	11,1
1870-79	20,7	9,8	9,3	10,7
1880-89	20,2	8,2	8,0	9,9
1890-1900	22,4	8,0	7,1	9,6

## Births out of wedlock per 1000 unmarried women 16-50 years of age (yearly average)

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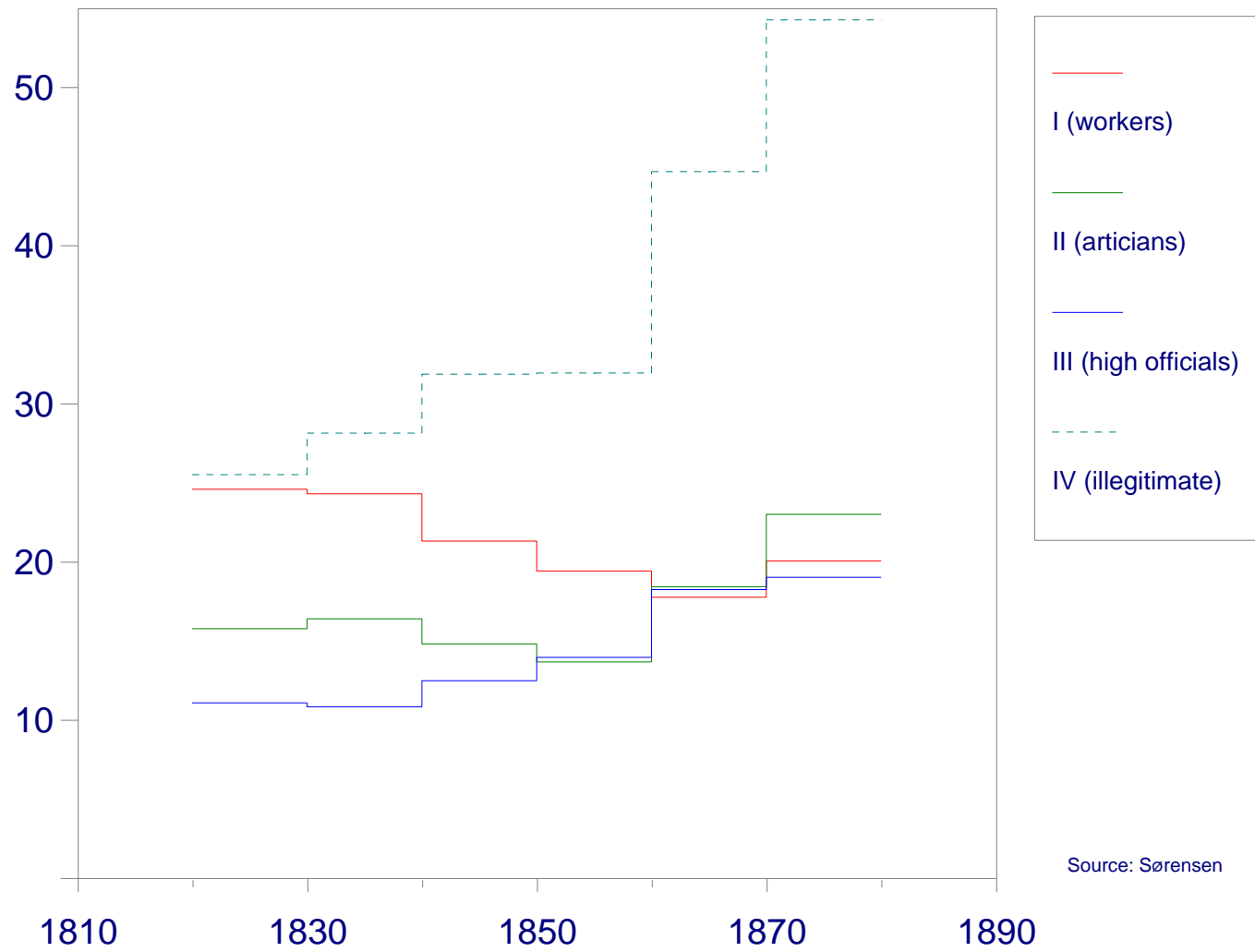
	Copen- hagen	Provencial towns	Rural districts
1860-69	42,0	27,0	29,0
1870-79	41,2	24,7	27,8
1880-89	46,9	20,4	23,8
1890-1900	42,1	20,7	20,7

Figure 2: Deaths of infants under 1 year old pr. 100 live births, Denmark 1802-1996



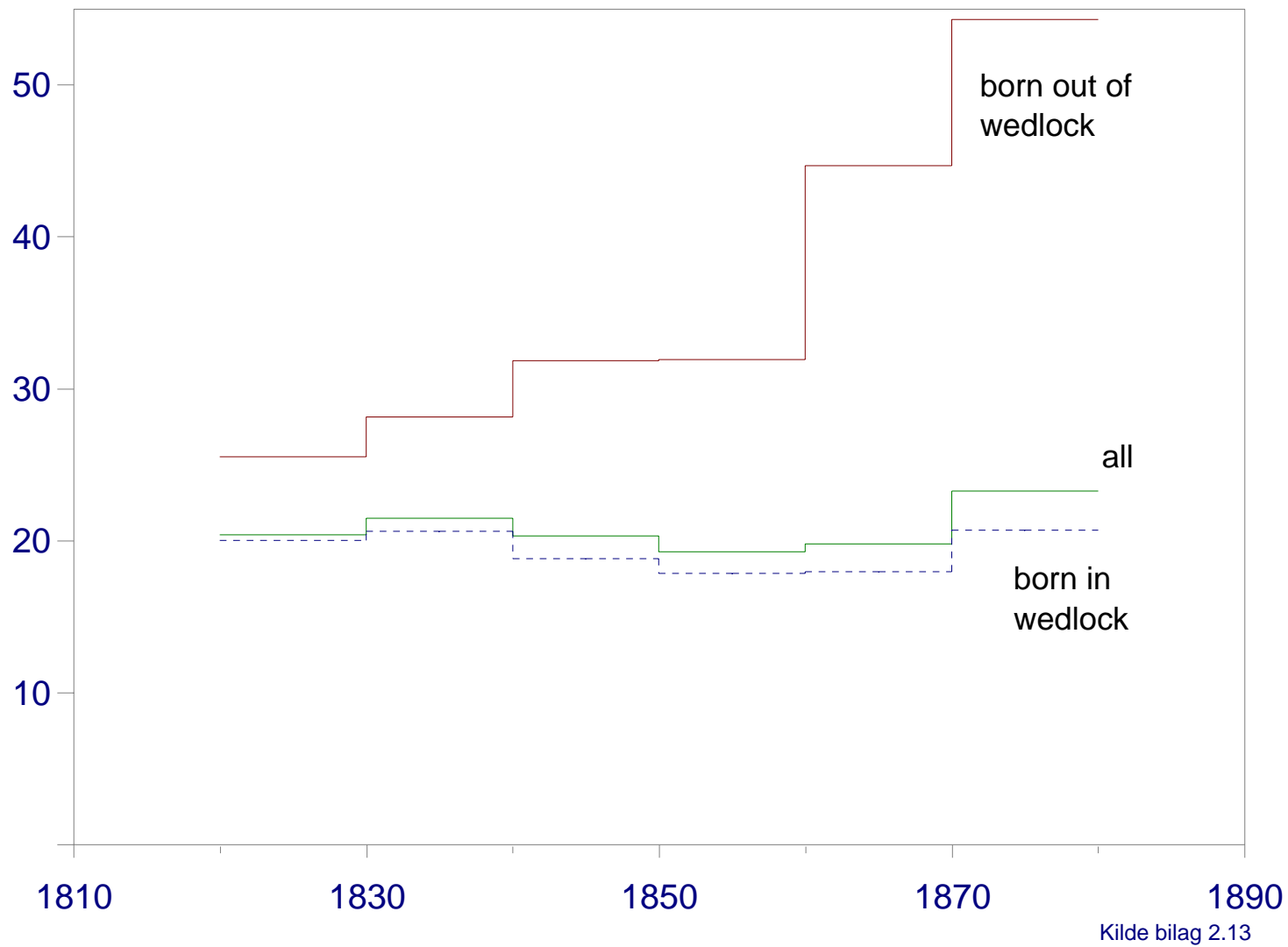
Sources: For 1835-1996 see Løkke, *Døden i Barndommen*, p. 478. 1802-1834 is constructed for this paper from the number of deaths under 10 years old, based upon the assumption that the number of deaths under one year of age made the same proportion of all deaths under ten years old in the periods 1802-1809, 1810-1819, 1820-29 and 1830-34 as in 1835-39.

Figure 3: Deaths of infants under 1 year old pr. 100 live births, Copenhagen (Christianshavn) 1820-1879

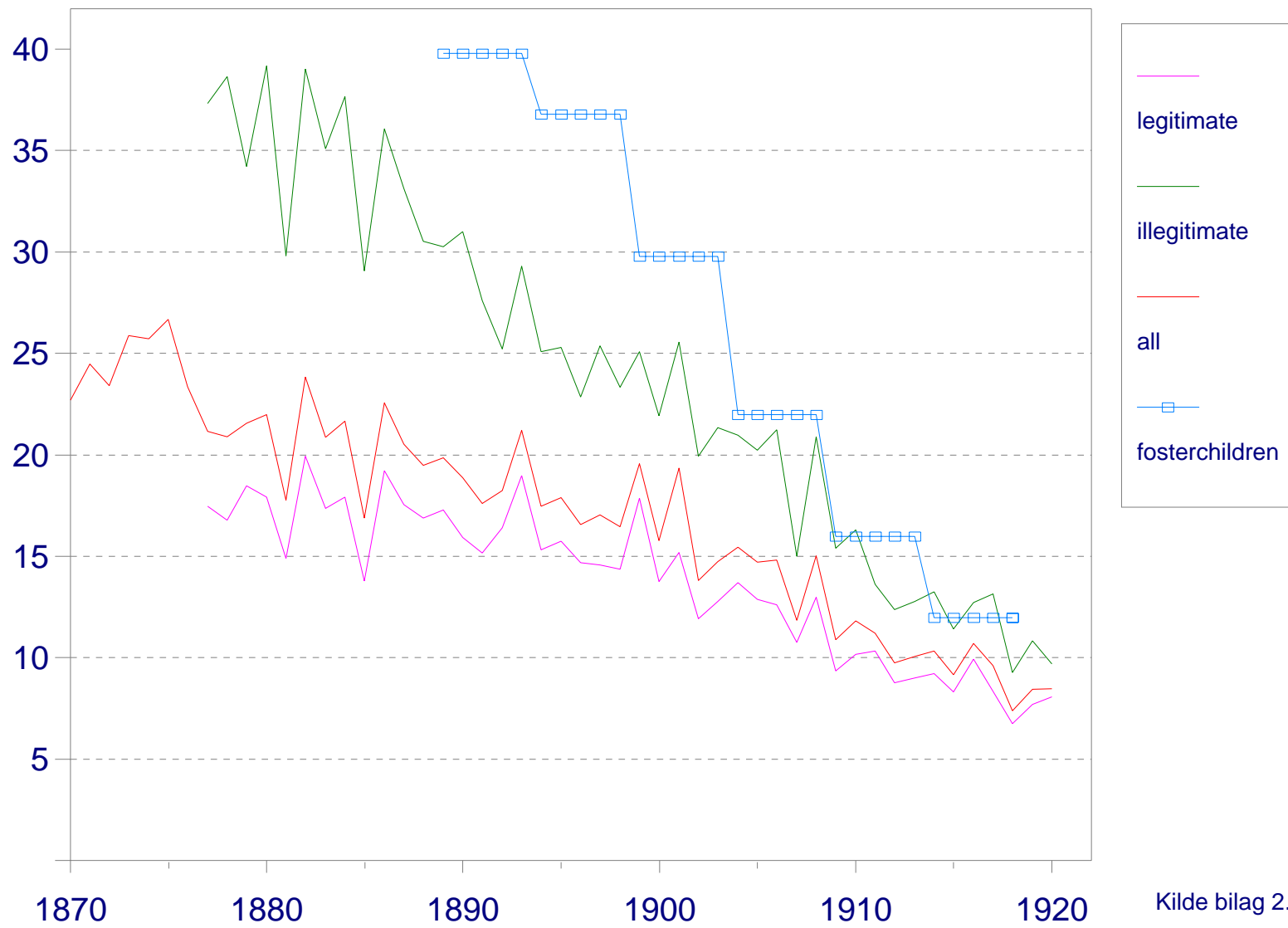


Source: Sørensen

Figur 2.45:  
Death in the first year of life per 100 llive born at Cristiانشavn 1820-1879

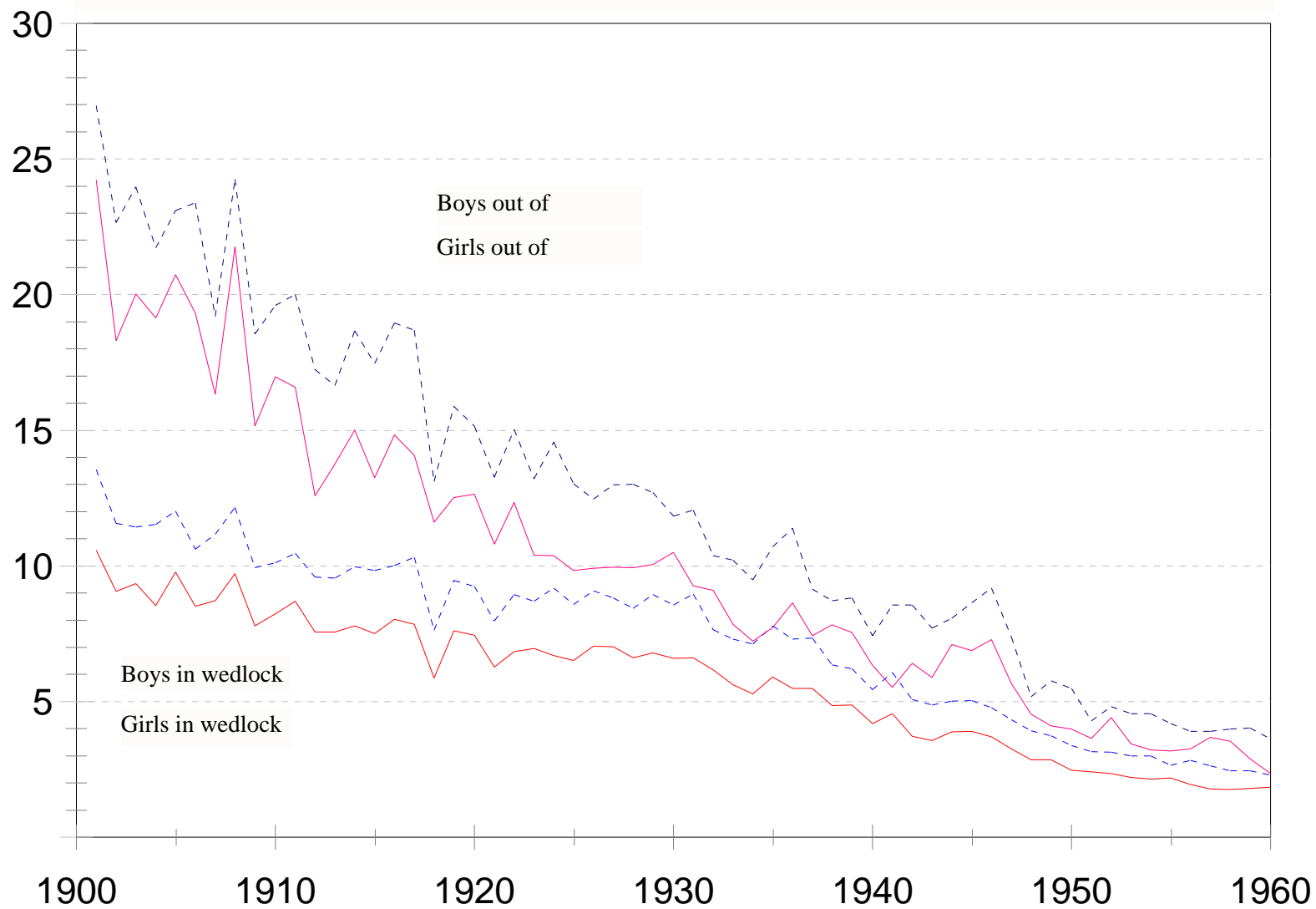


Deaths of infants under 1 year old pr. 100 live births, Copenhagen 1870-1920



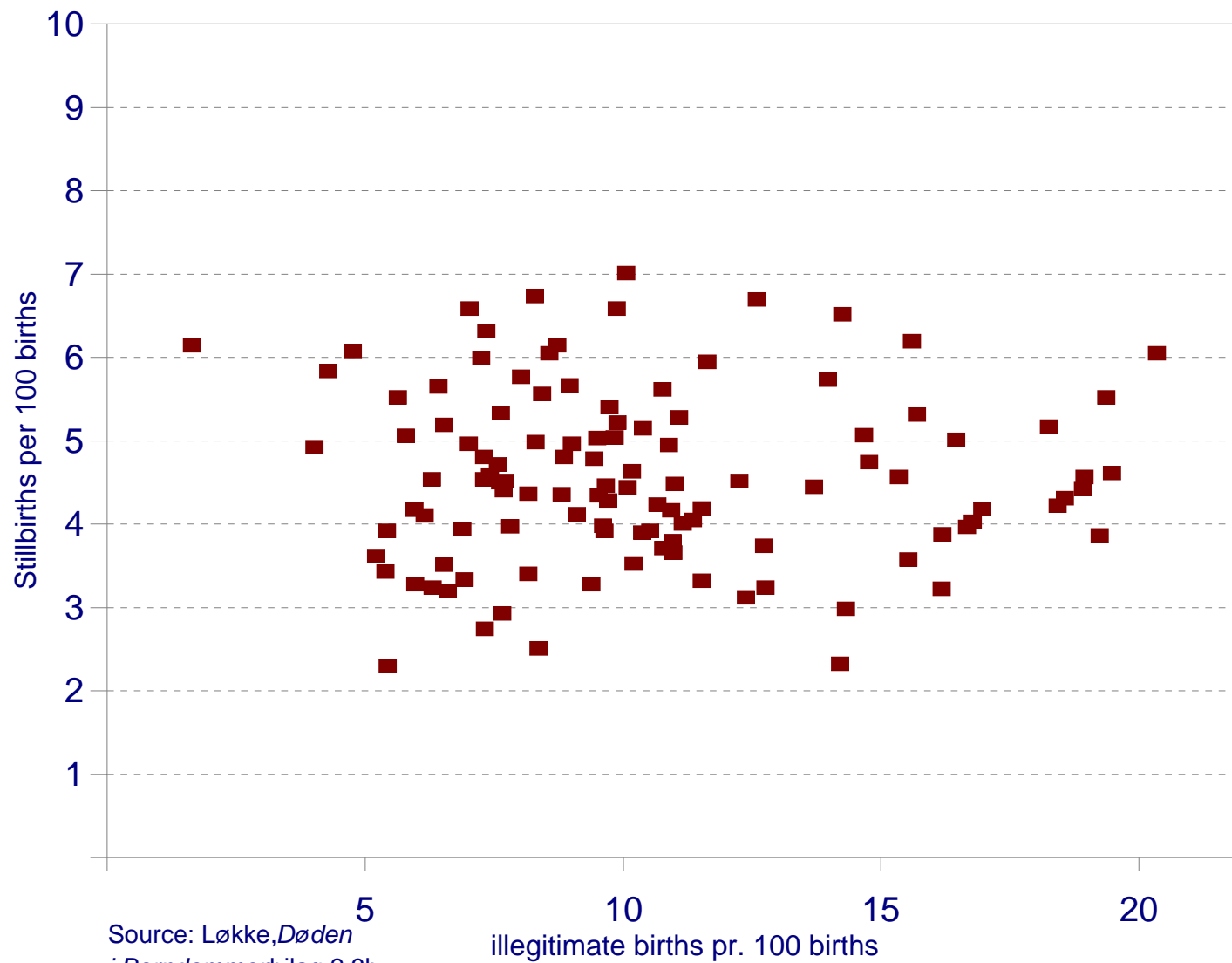
Kilde bilag 2.11

Figure \*: Deaths in the first year of life pr. 100 live births in and out of wedlock.  
Denmark 1901-1960

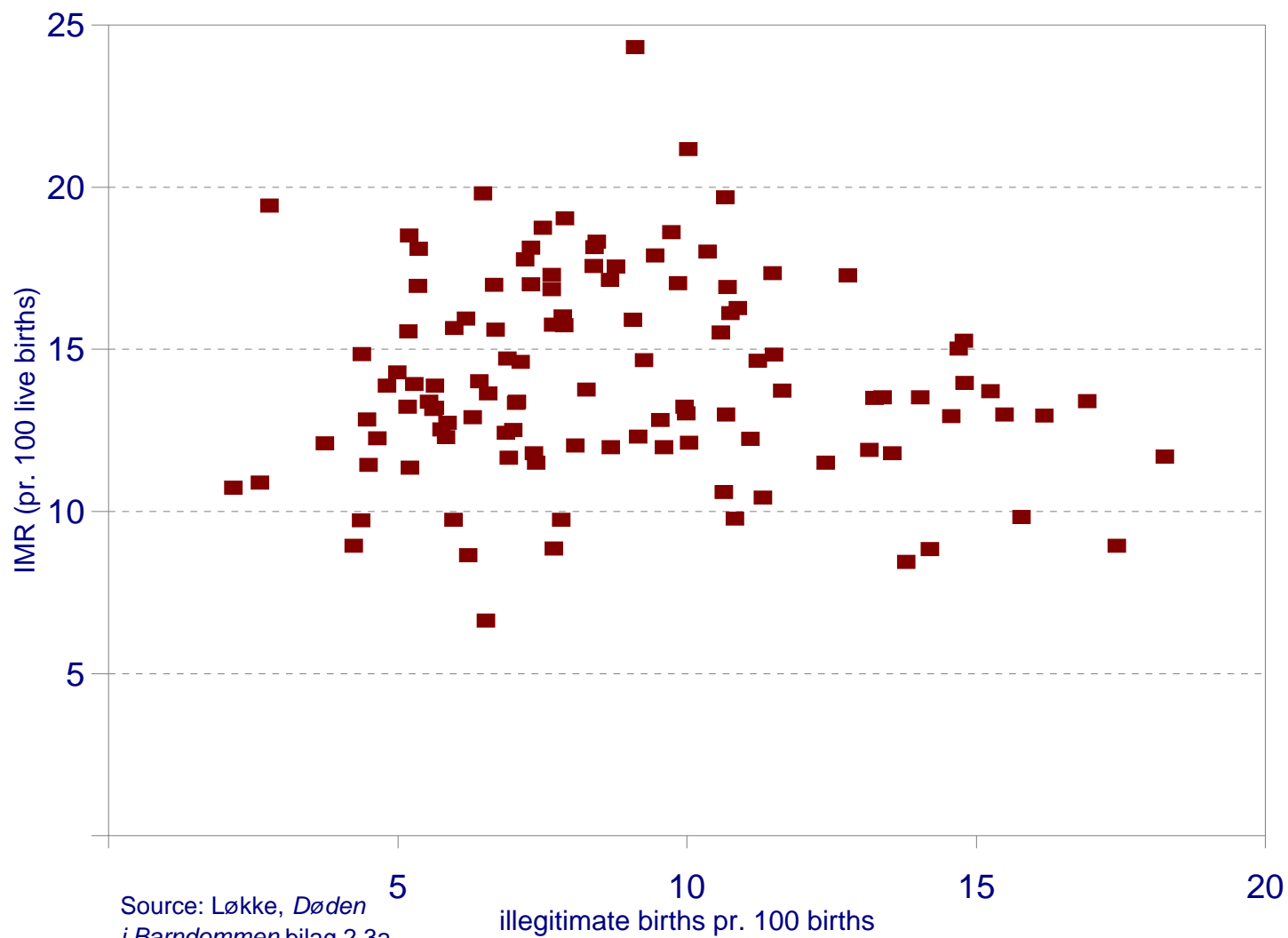


Source: Befolkningsudvikling pp.

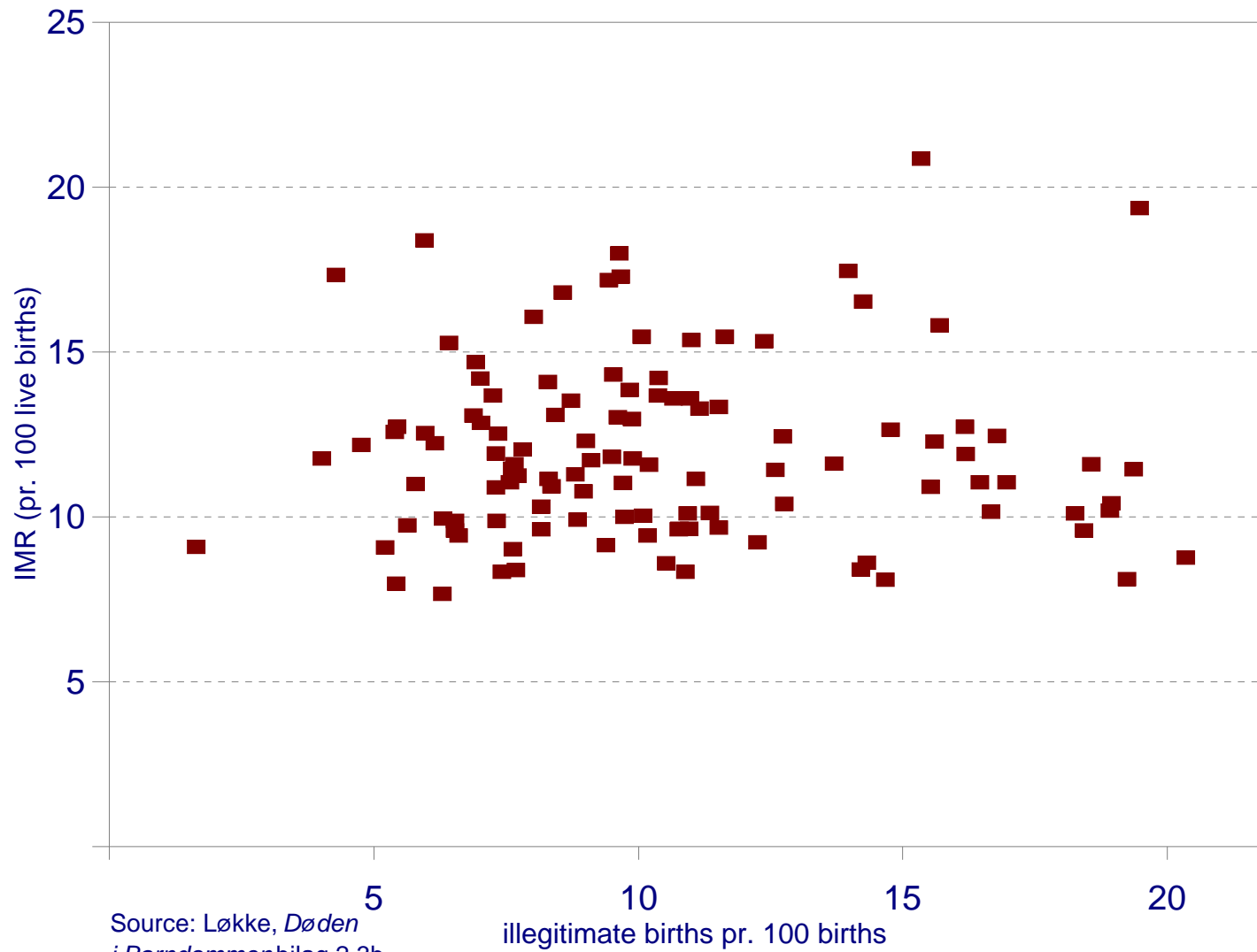
Figure \*:  
Illegitimacy and stillbirths in rural districts 1850-54



Figur 9a:  
Illegitimacy and IMR in rural districts 1836-40



Figur 9b:  
Illegitimacy and IMR in rural districts 1850-54



# Types of illegitimacy and IMR

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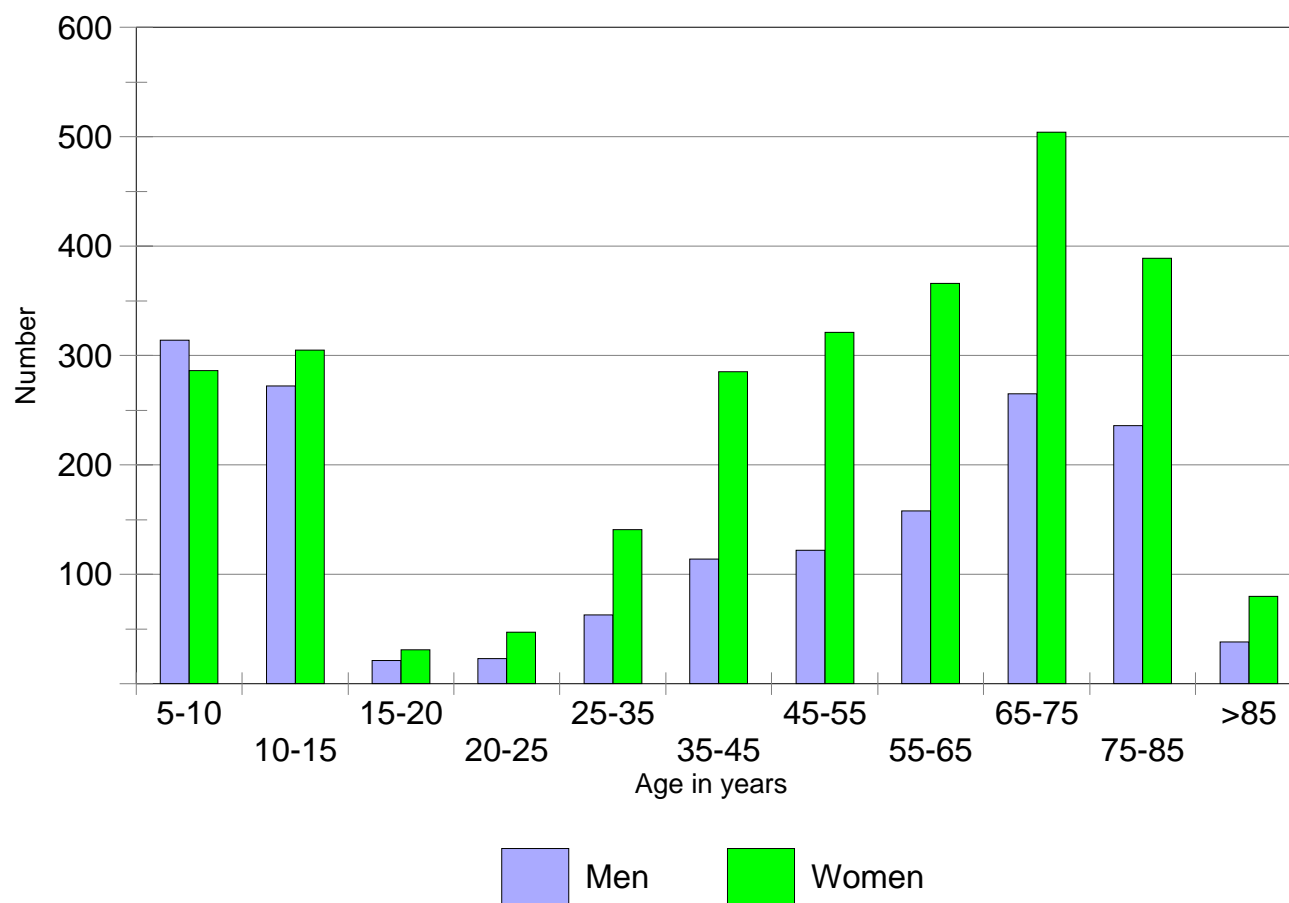
- Only juridical illegitimate
  - Legitimated not long after births
  - IMR like legitimate + stress in pregnancy
- Social illegitimate – living with mother
  - IMR like legitimate + stress in pregnancy + unequal pay
- Social illegitimate – not living with mother
  - IMR + stress in pregnancy (15-20 % preterm births at The Royal Maternity Hospital 1840-1850) + bottle feeding

# Status of mother in two rural parishes after the first illegitimate birth 1835-1880

(Source Agnete Birger Madsen, under publication)

Parish	Illegitimate* 100/all births	mother from outside parish	Married to father	Married to some- one else	Servant	House- keeper	With her parents	Unknown
Janderup	2,8	36 %	44 %	25 %	13 %	13 %	6 %	
Sct. Hans	15,1	68 %	11 %	19 %	44 %	4 %	15 %	6 %

# Poor relief receivers in rural districts. Fyn 1880-census.



# Unintended effects of poor relief administration in Copenhagen

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- In the 1850s unwed mothers were forced to live with their illegitimate infants if they would receive poor relief. It was meant as a penalty to keep down loose morals
- This practice was loosened after 1860, as unwed mothers were more and more seen as victims and less and less as offenders

# Interventions to reduce the excess IMR

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The Royal Maternity Hospital 1750-

Registration of stillbirths

The 1803 poor law

A new concept of morality => the battle for registration of excess mortality

The movement of honorable men =>

1888 public inspection of foster children +

1888 law of compulsory contribution to the maintenance of illegitimate children with poor law consequences for the father if he failed to pay

# Conclusions

- ~~The treatment of social illegitimate infants~~ can be seen as a structural check on the rise of the very poor population
  - The capital of the mother (social, economical, cultural) was tested and the devil took the last
- Initiatives were taken to curb the excess mortality already from 1750 – and still more were taken as the economic growth was experienced after 1850.

# Not all the rescue attempts were successful

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- The 1750 attempt to reduce direct infanticide by helping mothers to give births anonymous and leave the infant may have increased the IMR (and it DID increase the maternal mortality by inducing puerperal fever)
- The 1803 poor law may have reduced the IMR until its more liberal administration (1860s-)

# Could Denmark afford to let the illegitimate children among the poor people live?

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- The question is misleading, because Denmark can not fruitfully be analyzed as a subject capable of action. If you ask, however, about the economic aspects of the life and death of the illegitimate children, the answers are:
- The social illegitimate children among the poor died from poverty, gender inequality, morality and unintended effects of help
- Many eighteenth and nineteenth century agents, with the king in front, thought it an economic loss to society.
- Economic resources in society as a whole was not sufficient to secure an equal IMR. The illegitimate children continued to have an excess IMR in the twentieth century. The social, economical, cultural capitals of the mother were still the crucial factors for the survival of the child.