

KVINNOVÄRLDAR OCH BARNAMORD

Makt, ansvar och gemenskap i rättsprotokoll ca
1700-1840

With an English Summary

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Abstract

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The main purpose of the thesis is to examine how women, through women worlds, were able to execute power and responsibility during the 18th and 19th centuries. The main source of the investigation has been court records on cases of infanticide. From the Court of Appeal 152 trials from 1790-94 and 1830-34 have been investigated as backdrop for a more close-up study of a total of 45 cases from district courts. The study takes its point of departure from the crisis that arose in the local community in cases of infanticide. A main issue investigated is why women played such an active role in revealing infanticide. The court records show that married women took on responsibility for unmarried women in their vicinity. Mothers and mistresses held special positions when it comes to responsibility and power.

The infanticide was a crisis and a challenge for the local community, but it also entailed a possibility for the women worlds. In trials it became obvious that the women world had failed in its task to prevent and reveal an out of wedlock pregnancy and infanticide. At the same time the women world could actively restore and regain its status. This occurred when maidens and wives witnessed on the efforts actually made by mistresses or mothers to expose infanticides.

The women worlds existed within the household but also exceeded it given that women's responsibilities were not limited to the own household. Women were often present and active in court trials and men rarely took part in exposing infanticide. This indicates that women worlds played a crucial role in the local community.

KEYWORDS women worlds, social relations, infanticide, 18th century, 19th century, power, responsibility, collectivity, gender, household, court records