



AMBIGUOUS ADVENTURES: CHILDREN DRIVING TRACTORS IN RURAL ICELAND

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Introduction

- Across historical periods and societies, capacity attributed to children varies
- In the early 1960s most farms in Iceland had access to a tractor
 - Some farmers had little experience in driving vehicles
 - Children were entrusted with the task of driving tractors
- Confronted with fatal tractor accidents, the Parliament debated new legislation about minimum age for driving tractors off-road

Aim

- Describe the experience of driving a tractor as a child while staying on a farm during the summer months
- Evaluate the extent of fatal tractor accidents by age and gender

Methods

■ Qualitative data

- Interviews with individuals born in 1918-2001 who stayed at farms in childhood during the summer months

■ Quantitative data

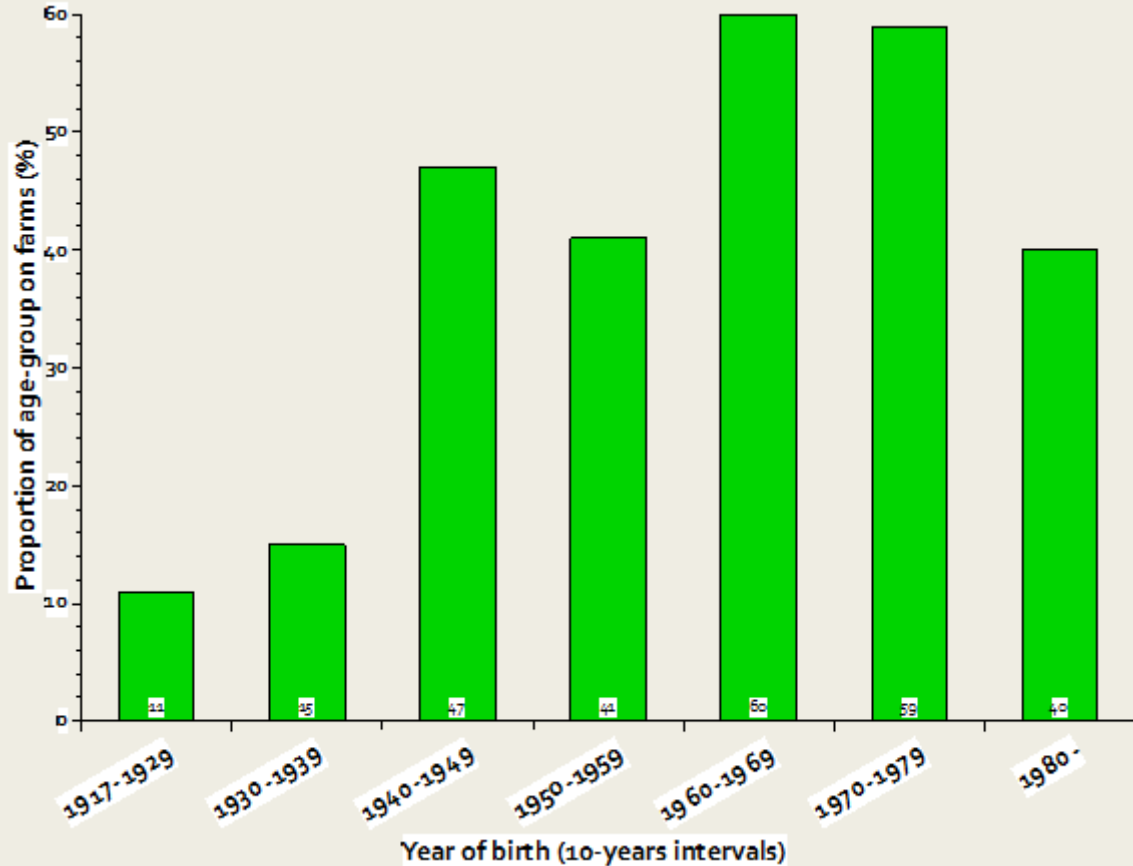
- Representative survey data on adults who stayed on farms
 - Stratified random sample by Registers Iceland (N=2000)
 - Response rate 65% (n=1295) / Sent to stay on farms 41% (n=534)
- Reports from Administration of Occupational Safety and Health
- News reports of fatal tractor accidents (timarit.is)

Drove tractor: 49%

- Boys 70%
- Girls 24%

Accident or some trouble

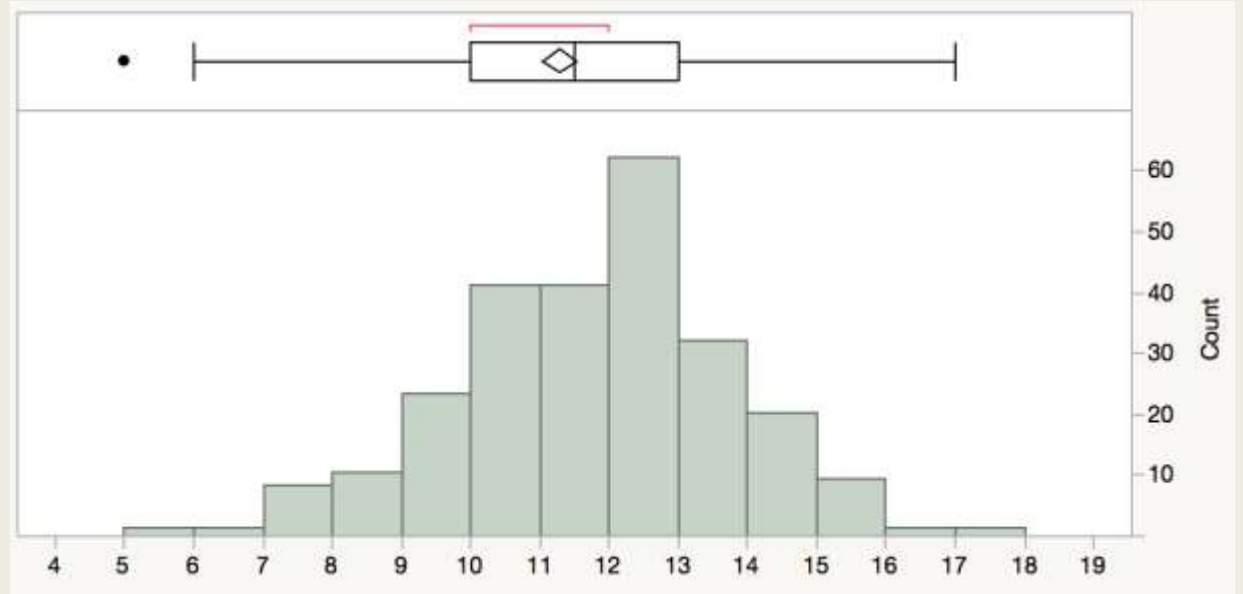
- Boys 10%
- Girls 8%



Age at driving tractor for the first time

Average 11,4
years

Boys 11,0 years
Girls 12,7 years



Former director for The Soil Conservation Service of Iceland:



"In the summer of 1951 I was placed on Farmall Cub I was only five years old and did not hit the clutch and brake, so my father's brother Páll Sveinsson watched me and put the engine on, then jumped off the tractor and then returned by jumping on the tractor at the end of the day or when the work was over. Then, I was put on more tractors in the summer of 1952 and 1953 for various agricultural jobs."

(Bændablaðið 8 APRIL 2016)

Ambiguous adventure

- Both men and women who had driven tractors as children reported that experience as the most exciting one
- With time, though to varied degree, there was an increased awareness about accidents but still the children were driving tractors



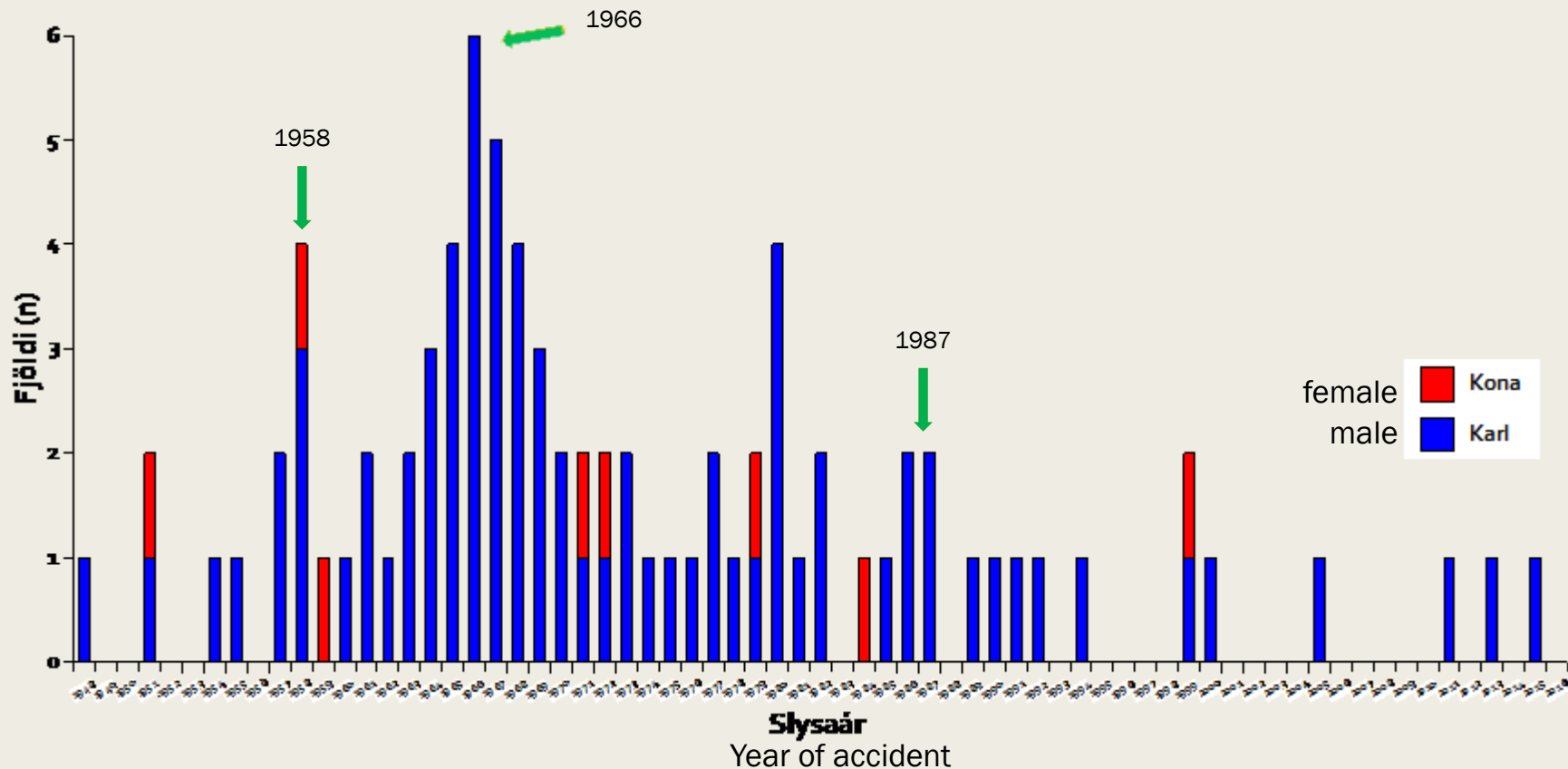
The Parliament - Alpingi

- In 1958, bill on minimum age for driving tractors off roads rejected (was 18 years)
 - A study and preventive measures
- In 1966, the report on tractor accidents published
 - Many children died in tractor accidents
- In 1966, bill on minimum age again rejected
 - Heavily debated: „There are fewer teens dying than adults.“
 - Preventive measures and control
- In 1987, the minimum age 13 years adopted
 - Increased to 15 years in 2006

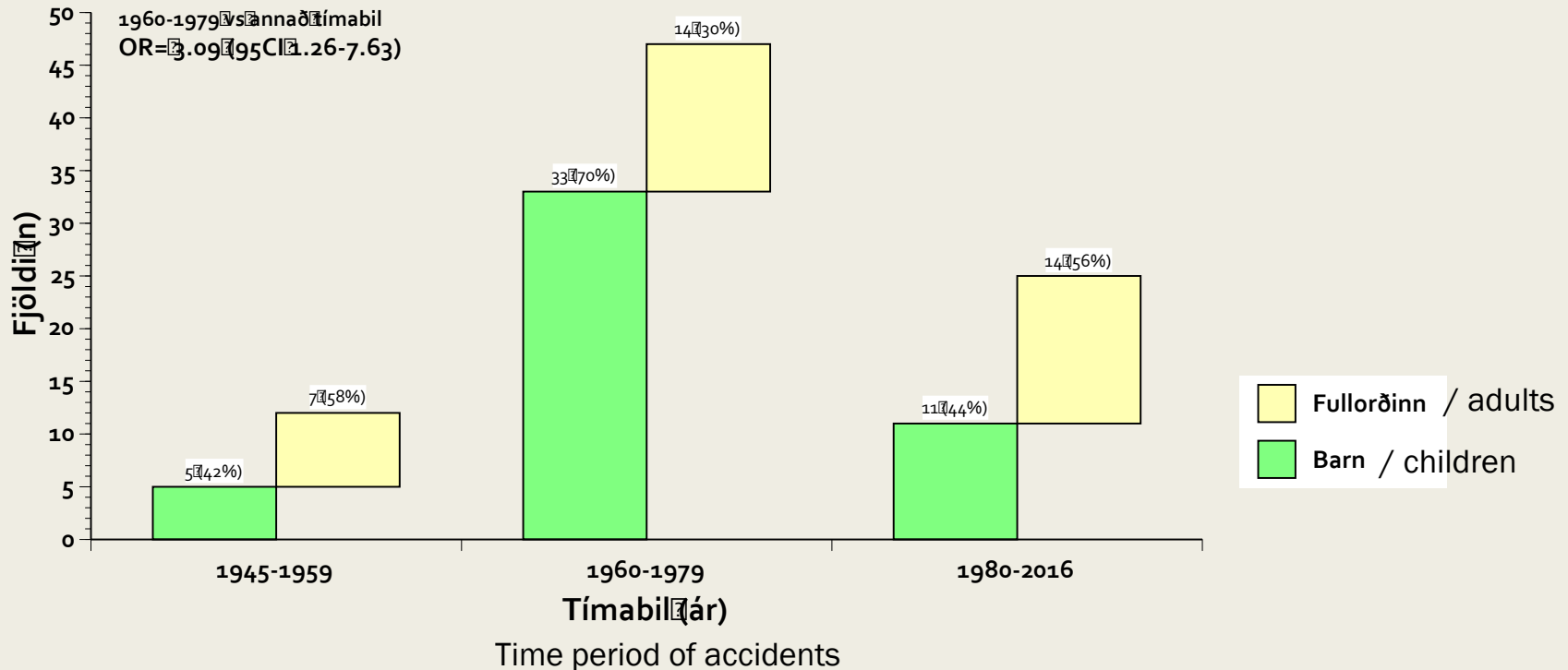
Arguments against minimum age and 'too much' control

- „The only labor the farmers can recruit during the summer months are teens 10–15 years old.“
- „The best tractor-drivers I have had are 12–14 years old teens.“
- „Having so-called experts controlling the tractors is far too much.“
- Outrageous „to demand that tractors have light bulbs.“

Fatal tractor accidents by year and gender



In the period 1960-1979, the risk was 3.1 (95% CI 1.3-7.6) times higher for a child compared to an adult to die in a tractor accident compared to earlier and later periods



Conclusion

- The history of children driving tractors in Iceland exposes the diverse views on children's capacity
- Preventive actions, for example, through legislation but also other security measures contributed to a sharp decline in child deaths in tractor related accidents

