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Partnerships norms and childlessness in Hungary and Transylvania in European view



Abstract This paper provides an overview of female childlessness and partnerships in Europe by using European Values Study – an international survey. Furthermore it focuses on Hungary and Transylvania more deeply based on interview analysis in these two societies. According to our findings, fundamental changes are currently in progress in Europe and the correlation of childbearing and the changes of relationships is going to be weaker and weaker. We found that childless women in Hungary are more tolerant towards childbearing by single mothers than their Transylvanian peers who are more emphasized the dimension of selfishness and the lack of a father model related to single motherhood. As for having children in same-sex partnership there are different attitudes: in northern and western countries were more liberal than in the southern or eastern countries. The interviews revealed that this issue has strong connection with traditional attitudes regarding families.

Keywords childlessness; partnerships; single motherhood; adoption by same-sex couples

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1 Introduction

Historically and across societies, failure to marry has been the most common reason for childlessness (Miettinen et al. 2015). This strong link between the lack of partnership formation and childlessness remained in the contemporary societies (BERRINGTON 2004; SZALMA – TAKÁCS 2015). In today's Europe, single women are still the most likely to be childless while married women are the least likely to be childless (see e.g. PORTANTI – WITHWORTH 2009; TANTURRI 2009). However, the link between marriage and childlessness is expected to weaken due to some social changes (MIETTINEN et al. 2015).

One of the social changes that can influence the strong relationship between marriage and childbearing is the substantial increase in non-marital fertility in recent decades in most European countries. In the early 1960s, no more than 10 per cent of births took place outside marriage in any European regions, while by 2012 in most European regions the proportion of births out of wedlock was around 40% (OLÁH 2015). Since Scandinavian countries are often the forerunners in demographic trends, out-of-wedlock births started to increase there already from the 1960s, and other regions (Western-Europe and Central-East European societies) followed two decades later. Finally, in the last decades Southern European countries also showed increase in out-of-wedlock births (OLÁH 2015).

The spread of new partnership formations such as living apart together (Levin 2004) also contributes to some form of single parenthood, since the partners do not live in the same household. However, some researches showed that in most cases this partnership formation is chosen by partners who have children from their former relationships and try to avoid disrupting the environment their resident children are familiar with (BEAUJOUAN et. al 2009).

As regards childbearing, not only cohabitation was an indispensable partnership norm but also heteronormativity was a strong norm in all societies until the 21 century. However, new forms of families have emerged since 2001, when the adoption of children by same-sex couples was allowed for the first time in the Netherlands.¹ By now it has become legal in 15 European countries so the link between heteronormativity and having children has also weakened.

The other social change which can weaken the relationship between marriage and childlessness is the availability of fertility treatments for single women and same-sex couples. ART is increasingly perceived as one way to alleviate the problems of involuntary childlessness. 'An estimated five million babies have been born with the help of assisted reproduction in the past four decades, a sizable share of them in Europe' (PRAG–MILLS 2015).

This paper contains two parts: in the first part we examine what kinds of norms are needed to have children regarding partnership norms in all over Europe. In particular we try to understand whether there is any difference among European countries or we cannot observe any different patterns across Europe. To map the European attitudes in this question we analyse international survey data. In the second part of the analysis we try to dig deeper in understanding the relationship between norms regarding partnership formation and childlessness by analysing 31 interviews conducted with childless women in Hungary and Transylvania.

2 Social norms of childbearing: norms regarding partnership

As regards childbearing a commonly shared opinion is that this life event has great significance not only on micro but also on macro level (e.g. ELLINGSAETER et. al 2013; SZALMA 2011).

¹ probably this forms of families existed before 2001 but it was the first time when it became visible and legally accepted

Childbearing is beyond question directly indispensable for a society to reproduce itself. Taking a close look at the issue of childbearing we realize it is no different from any other life event: it is again a socially embedded life event interwoven by an array of norms. Several norms define e.g. the ideal age of having children (PAKSI – SZALMA 2009); we only need to think of pregnancy at a young or an old age, towards which the majority of society is not liberal. Norms also influence what material conditions we consider required to become parents (SZALMA 2010), or what marital status we regard as ideal for raising children (SZALMA 2010).



Most sociologists believe that in order to regard a rule or expectation to be a norm, three criteria have to be fulfilled. Firstly, it has to prescribe certain behaviour (or on the contrary, prohibit it). Secondly, society needs to share consensus about the rule in question. Finally, the third criterion is that the rule or expectation has to be of constraint character, i.e. its violation must be punished by some sanction (SETTERSTEN 2003). Does it entail any sanctions if one has a baby at an age not considered ideal by most people? Sanctions may be informal as well, such as mocking, disdain and gossip. For example, if a woman has no partner, her pregnancy might become the object of ridicule in a specific community.

HECKHAUSEN's (1999) argumentation says that it is unnecessary to propose sanctions connected to age norms since they are norms that have already been internalized by the majority of people. It can be also true for norms regarding partnership formation for childbearing- they have also been internalized: stable heterosexual partnership was needed for the transition to parenthood. Due to the social changes both at individual level (types of partnership) and macro level (changes in the legal background of access to assisted reproduction technologies and legitimizing adoption by same-sex partnerships in some countries) the social norms regarding partnership formations might have changed.

Since births out of wedlock became more and more widespread, the high divorce rate and single parenting swept away the informal sanctions so the social norms became more and more liberal regarding partnership formations at individual level. Furthermore, we can also witness how the legal sanction appears with the spread of assisted reproduction technologies. The following European countries permit singles to utilize ART services in 2013: Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Russia, Spain and the United Kingdom (PRAG – MILLS 2015). When it comes to lesbian women, the situation is less liberal, only the following European countries permit them to use this service: Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Spain and the United Kingdom. Additionally, the new legislation such as adoption by same sex parents at macro level also brings legal possibilities for gay and lesbians to have children (TAKÁCS–SZALMA 2014).

3 Data, variables and methods

The European Value Study (EVS) is a large-scale longitudinal survey research programme applying multistage probabilistic sampling and has been assessing the value choices, attitudes and norms of citizens on the continent according to a standardized set of criteria every nine years since 1981. The EVS is a cross-national comparative survey planned according to rigorous standards. The survey was recorded with the help of interviewers. The representative sample

of Hungarian citizens over 18 included 1513 respondents, while the sample for 34 countries consisted of 45863. The sample size of the specific countries was as follows: 808 respondents (in Iceland) and 2075 in Germany. The survey has always contained questions investigating social norms related to childbearing. However, we examine them only from the second wave of 1990 as that was when Eastern European countries, among others Hungary, joined the EVS for the first time.

Two questions are included concerning family formations: *'If a woman wants to have a child as a single parent, but she doesn't want to have a stable relationship with a man, do you approve or disapprove?'* and *'If someone says a child needs a home with both a father and a mother to grow up happily, would you tend to agree or disagree?'* At both variables the only possible answers are 'yes' or 'no'.

In addition, the question of our interest examining attitudes to adoption by homosexual couples and assisted reproduction was included in the last round of EVS. Each participating country must (should) list and ask variables in exactly the same form as they appear in the central survey. Despite that, the Hungarian version of the questionnaire included a statement completely different to the original question of our interest. Instead of the original variable saying: *'Homosexual couples should be able to adopt children'* – the Hungarian version of the questionnaire included a statement to the contrary: *'Homosexual couples should not be allowed to adopt children'*. Even if the scale is reversed the two statements are methodologically incomparable, thus we will bear this difference in mind when comparing Hungarian data with other countries.

To analyse survey data descriptive statistical methods were applied to show European's attitudes to family formations connected to childbearing. The 34 countries examined were the following: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Holland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. We want to demonstrate differences among the countries as well as changes with time, so we also present cross-sectional data whenever possible - of 1990, 1999 and 2008.

Beside the secondary analysis of survey data we also made an interview survey. In the summer of 2012 twenty life path interviews in Hungary² and in the spring of 2014 eleven interviews were conducted with childless heterosexual women in Transylvania³. From age point of view the sample was selected as follows: women aged minimum 35, but the sample was carefully chosen to include women from every age group. The sample is stratified according to educational level: low educated (no secondary school leaving exam), secondary level as well as higher educated women were represented. Beside age and educational level the sample was also stratified according to the place of residence in Hungary: it included interviewees from Budapest, the capital, some from a regional capital and some from a village of 3000 residents. However the interviews were conducted only in the biggest city of Transylvania: Cluj-Napoca with Hungarian minorities. The composition of the sample is summarized in Table 1.

² The 20 interviews conducted in Hungary were analyzed in detail in a previous publication titled: Szalma – Takács 2014.

³ Here I would like to thank Izabella Szabó, who conducted the interviews for her BA thesis and kindly allowed me to analyse the data.

TABLE 1 ❖ *Sample composition*

Educational level	Partnership		Residence		Age		
HUNGARY							
Low	7	Married	3	Village	10	35–45	7
Secondary	7	Single	12	Regional capital	5	46–59	9
High	6	Other partnership (cohabitation, LAT)	5	Budapest	5	over 60	3
Total	20	Total	20	Total	20	Total	20
TRANSYLVANIA							
Low	2	Married	5	Cluj-Napoca 46–59 over 60	11	35–45	7
Secondary	4	Single	3			2	
High	5	Other partnership (cohabitation, LAT)	3			2	
Total	11	Total	11	Total	11	Total	11

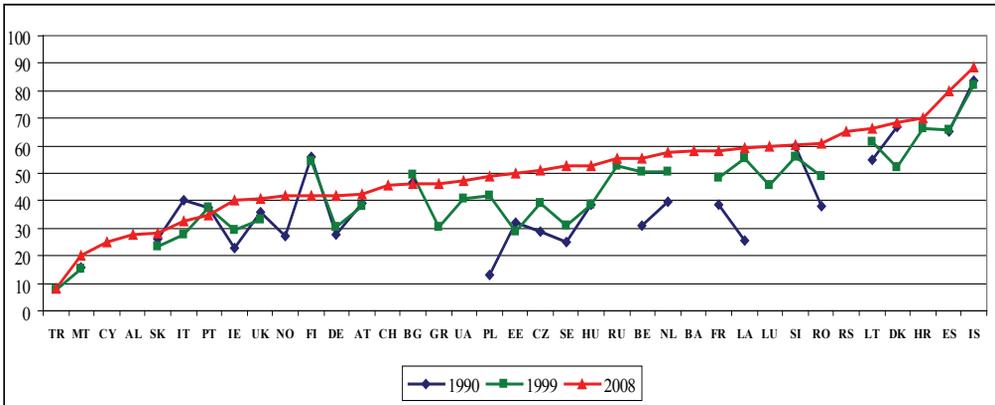
The interviewees were sought with the help of the snowball method. The social sensitivity of the topic was clearly demonstrated as many people eagerly “protected” their childless acquaintances by not forwarding our interview request, saying it would be emotionally painful for them to discuss. However, only few interview respondents secluded themselves completely. In this respect differences appeared according to age: those in their early forties were especially sensitive to the topic, presumably because they were in the process of accepting their childlessness to be final.

4 Results from the survey data

4.1 *Childbearing as a single parent*

As the single-parent family model is abundant in every European society (due to divorce, the death of one parent or women’s decision to have children without a stable relationship) it is worth examining the attitudes of people in the various societies to women who want to be single parents (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 ❖ If a woman wants to have a child as a single parent, but she doesn't want to have a stable relationship with a man Agreement rate with the above statement (%)



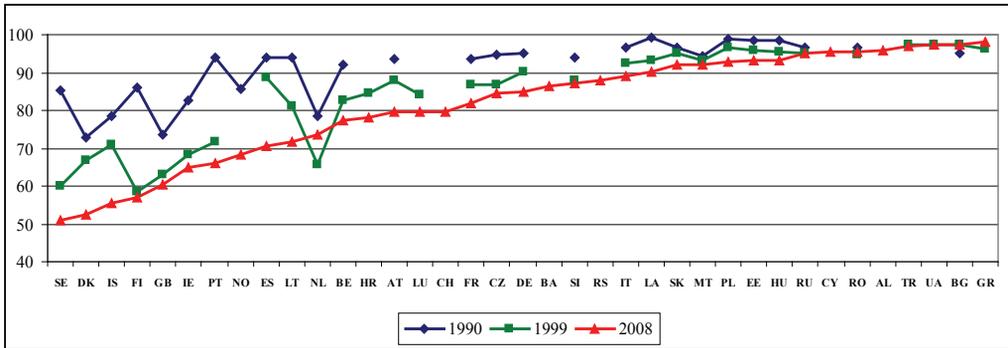
Source: European Values Study 1990, 1999 and 2008

Interestingly, in this issue we cannot find any differences among northern, eastern and western countries. For example Croatia is on the supportive side along with Lithuania, Serbia, Romania and Slovenia. The most supportive countries are Iceland and Spain, while Norway, the UK, Ireland, Portugal and Italy are less tolerant. Surprising as it may be, Norway is among the less supportive countries in spite of the fact that it is very often a precursor to most demographic changes. This might be due to the strong cultural norm of Norwegian society saying that childbearing must be a mutual decision of the parents (RAVN – LIE 2013). The least tolerant countries include Turkey, Malta, Cyprus, Albania and Slovakia. If we consider the trend over time, we can observe that except for Finland, Portugal and Italy all the countries became more and more supportive of the idea that women can have children even without a stable relationship.

This very mixed picture according to European regions might be because respondents may have associated different things to this statement. For example some people might have thought that if a woman stays alone with her children (because of divorce or death of the partner) she can opt to raise a child as a single mother in some Eastern European countries.

The following statement analyses a similar issue: ‘A child needs a home with both a father and a mother to grow up happily’.

Figure 2 ❖ *A child needs a home with both a father and a mother to grow up happily*
 Agreement rate with the above statement (%)



Source: European Values Study 1990, 1999 and 2008

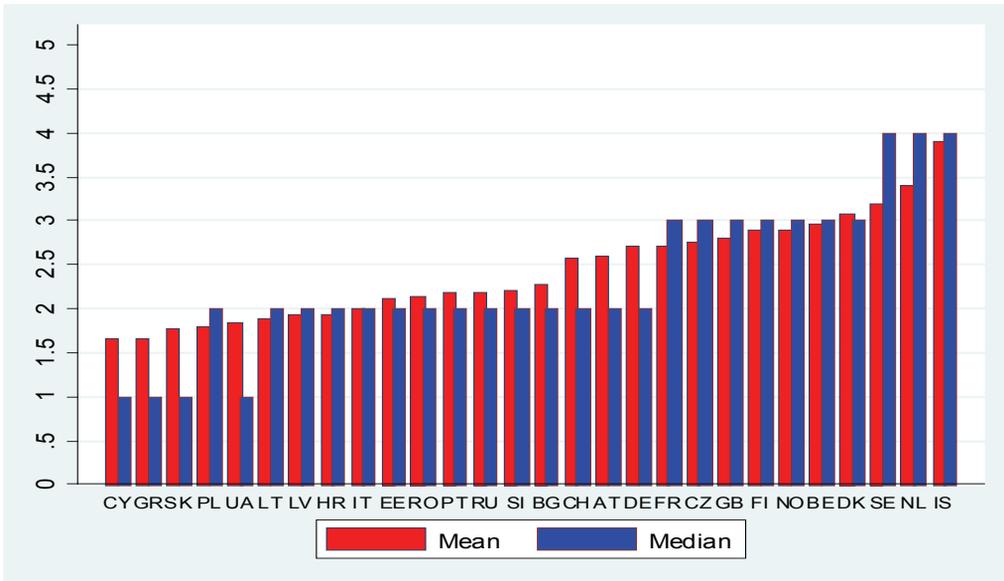
Demonstrably (see Figure 2) in all the countries in 1990 more than two third of respondents agreed with the statement that children needed mothers as well as fathers to grow up happily. By 2008 the rate of supporters in the northern countries had significantly decreased. The highest agreement rate was found in Greece and the post-socialist countries. In contrast, the northern countries, the UK, Ireland and Portugal agreed with this statement to the least.

4.2 *Childbearing by same-sex couples*

The investigation of social attitudes towards adoption by same-sex couples has particular relevance because since the 2000s the legal institution of adoption by same-sex couples have been established in several European countries (for example in Holland in 2001, in Sweden in 2003, in Spain in 2005, in Ireland and Belgium in 2006, in Norway and Denmark in 2009, and in France in 2013).

In countries where same-sex couples are allowed to adopt children the society is much more liberal towards same-sex partnerships, while respondents are the most dismissive in countries where neither same-sex partnership nor adoption by such couples has been institutionalized. The relationship might be a two-way one. On the one hand, legal institutions for same-sex couples could only have been set up in countries with more liberal societies, and on the other hand, any legal acknowledgement of same-sex partnership and/or adoption by homosexual or lesbian couples may affect and shape social attitudes as well (TAKÁCS-SZALMA 2011).

Figure 3 ❖ Homosexual couples should be able to adopt children
(1-strong disagreement 5-strong agreement)



Source: European Values Study 2008

According to Figure 3 we can observe that the most tolerant countries are the ones with legal possibility for same-sex adoption, such as the Netherlands, Belgium and the northern countries.

5 Results from the interview data: Hungary and Transylvania

In Central-Eastern Europe there have been only a limited number of empirical studies focusing specifically on childlessness [see, for example, HAŠKOVÁ 2010, 2011 and MYNARSKA et al. 2013. for Czech and Polish findings]. However, it can be expected that (at least partly) different reasons contribute to the development and increase of childlessness in Central-Eastern Europe than in Western Europe, especially regarding partnership norms.

According to the statistics we can find similarities between Hungary and Romania in the traditional family attitudes (MURINKÓ 2014), low fertility rate and low childlessness rate (OECD Family Database), although we can find different rates in the share of births outside of marriages in Romania (31%), which is much lower than in Hungary (44,5%).

As for legal backgrounds there is no legal option allowing joint adoption by same-sex couples either in Hungary or in Romania. Furthermore, in Hungary there is institutional discrimination regarding the impossibility of assisted reproduction for women living in a lesbian partnership (See: Article 167 of the Hungarian Health Care Act – No. CLIV. of 1997). In Romania there is not even a legal option for partnership formation for gays and lesbians, so the aforementioned discrimination against lesbian women in case of assisted reproduction does not exist.

In the next subchapters we will focus on partnerships norms related to childbearing based on the 31 interviews in the two societies.

5.1 Lack of partnership and childlessness

The Hungarian sample includes 11 single women, two of whom used to be married. Four women never cohabited with anyone before. In their cases there were various underlying causes such as problems brought from the parental home or the lack of social relationships.

'As a matter of fact my choice was quite out of my league... our dear mother is rather dominant, that's why I accepted a lot of things the way she wanted, just to keep peace.' (Evelin, 45, high educated, Hungary)

One of the respondents blames the career she chose in her twenties for keeping her at home and not allowing her to socialize enough.

'In other words I kept sitting at home beside my sewing machine and didn't go out. Well, who or how on earth could have met me? Not a chance.' (Irén 58, low educated, Hungary)

The other key reason is that the parents, especially the mothers do not want the youngest children to leave home.

'And for two years, but then some time passed, and he could eventually come into our house, but then in the end my dear mother did manage to scare him off.' (Jusztika, 67, low educated, Hungary)

They all have in common that they regret the way this part of their lives turned out and said if they could have a fresh start, they would make different choices and try to establish relationships.

'That period (of mating) is the only time in my life which, if I could have another go at it, I would probably do it somewhat differently' (Evelin, 45, higher educated, Hungary).

'I've realized since then what a bad decision it was. It was quite early, let's say, for me to stay at home at the age of 20... If I hadn't stayed and I had found a job somewhere else, I may not have remained single.' (Irén, 58, low educated, Hungary)

'I should have been more independent and determined' (Jusztika, 67, low educated, Hungary).

The Transylvanian sample includes 4 single women, all of whom have partnership experiences from the past. The main features of singleness here are too much work and/or distance between the partners. For example one of the women still lives in a LAT partnership but she considers herself single.

'Did you say you were single?' (interviewer)

'You cannot call a long-distance relationship cohabitation, there's no common life actually... The idea of having children has come up, but we don't live in the same household, so I don't think it makes any sense' (Gréta, 40, higher educated, Transylvania).

'I did not follow him (abroad), he didn't stay here, so we broke up' (Márta, 35, secondary school education, Transylvania)

'We were busy working and we rarely allowed ourselves any spare time' (Szabina, 46, secondary school education, Transylvania)

We can observe that in Transylvania more respondents explained their lack of partner status (more precisely quasi lack of partner status) by the distance. It seems that living in minorities often induced that people chose partners from a different settlement than their own hometown.

5.1.1 QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Regarding childbearing questionnaire surveys have also highlighted the importance of having a relationship, i.e. married couples have a bigger chance of having children than cohabiting couples, and people in any type of relationship have a bigger chance to have children than singles. Questionnaire surveys, however, do not allow us to understand the potential reasons why a couple remains childless in spite of having no health problems. Although demographic surveys (e.g. 'Turning Points of our Life') normally include questions concerning relationship quality, due to social pressure on respondents to view their current relationships as good, they can hardly be considered reliable (Kapitány 2012).

From the 20 Hungarian interviewees one married and one cohabiting woman reported the reason why they chose not to have children was because they were dissatisfied with the quality of their relationships.

'The one I live together with is a horrible character. Maybe he would like children, but he never clearly says so. He only says now that I'm 40, I should do something for this purpose. I think he suspects I don't want a child into such a relationship. I never told him that exactly, but I think he feels it. It's in the air.' (Erika, 40, low educated, Hungary).

Marika cheated on her husband several times and they have already thought of divorce. Eventually they did not get divorced, but since their ideas about raising children were extremely different, Marika decided not to bring children into the relationship.

'And when he stated once in a while that upbringing children requires a belt, I said not mine. And I thought as we don't share exactly the same ideas about child raising, we would probably have divorced after their birth, if not sooner.' (Marika, 50, secondary school education, Hungary)

It is interesting that the quality of the relationship appeared as an important factor also in the Transylvanian sample.

'In those (previous) relationships, I mean the way there were, I simply didn't feel any urge to have children. I would have felt trapped in either of them with a baby.' (Eszter, 35, higher educated, Transylvania).

'Although we meet every day, a partnership takes a bit more than that, so the issue of having children has never come up.' (Szabina, 46, secondary school education, Transylvania).

All in all we can say that having a relationship is necessary to have children in most cases but not a sufficient factor in itself. The quality of the relationship also matters in both societies and this question can hardly be investigated by surveys.

5.2 *Childbearing without relationship is acceptable?*

Although most single respondents regarded the lack of relationship as the reason for childlessness, we asked all of them about their opinion of women who raise their children by themselves, and if they had ever thought of having children alone. Various opinions were expressed. Some considered it brave, others simply selfish. Astonishingly no remarkable differences could be observed in this issue either according to educational level or age (or settlement types in Hungary). The differences were rather determined by religious values: women who claimed to be religious tended to view single parenting as selfish.

'I regard it as a rather selfish objective that I say okay, I want a child, and then I subordinate everything to that goal.' (Emma, higher educated, aged 40, Hungary).

'That's a very brave thing to do.' (Kati, secondary school education, aged 62, Hungary).

"She is not able to have a child alone" (Orsolya, 40, secondary school education, Transylvania)

'If there's no other solution and a woman really wants to have a child alone, then she should do so. I think it's alright' (Eszter, 35, higher educated, Transylvania).

In Transylvania the importance of the two genders is more emphatic so they have more concerns about single parenthood. However, all of them emphasized that if a woman's life takes a turn and she ends up being left alone with a child, she has to do her best to bring up the child. This indicates that some of them did not even understand the question regarding having children alone, but immediately pursued the idea and wondered what might possibly result in a situation when a woman must raise a child by herself (divorce, death of the partner).

'It's not okay because a child needs parents of different genders both from the point of view of sharing household chores and the normal development of the child's own gender identity' (Gréta, 46, university education, Transylvania).

'A child with only a mother will never learn what it's like to have a man in the family and what are a man's roles in a family.' (Marika, 50, secondary school education, Hungary)

'I think a child needs to see both a woman's attitude as well as a man's to find their own reference.' (Orsolya, with a secondary school leaving exam, 40 years old, Transylvania)

All interviewees agreed that raising a child can be very difficult, both financially and mentally. Low educated women lay a bigger emphasis on the financial side, while higher educated on the lack of free time in Hungary.

'Well, it's tough. Also financially.' (Aranka, 45, lower educated, Hungary)

'Nowadays demands are so high, children need to be dressed so perfectly that I think the mother alone could not afford that.' (Irénke, 78, low educated, Hungary)

'Well, it's a financial challenge in the first place as she has to earn what's needed for everyday life' (Izabella 40, with a secondary school leaving exam, Transylvania)

'Single parents can't make it to a lot of places, and many issues are more difficult to solve.' (Lili, higher educated, Hungary).

'Well, nowadays it's a financial difficulty, not to mention a schedule, which depends on how much help a mother gets from her parents or friends.' (Márta, 35, secondary school education, Transylvania).

All of them agreed that a supportive environment (mostly grandparents, relatives, friends, nursery school and kindergarten) is indispensable if you want to raise children alone.

'It could be an aunt, an uncle, a cousin, or someone else from the wider family, anybody. I don't believe it should necessarily be the child's father, but somebody or some people who can help once in a while. Sometimes physical or constant presence isn't even the point, but the thought itself might also be very helpful, in my opinion, to have someone I can turn to in case of trouble.' (Evelin, higher educated, 48, Hungary)

'And for my mom too, because my grandma was there. So we were looked after, and as I said, we had this cohesive supervision in the street.' (Kati, secondary level education, aged 62, Hungary).

'It's great to be able to count on the parent financially, or when help is needed to look after the kids or something similar, a parent is the best support.' (Jusztika, low educated, aged 68, Hungary).

'Some help from outside is definitely necessary' (Aliz, 40, university education, Transylvania).

Beside personal relationships the lack of nursery and kindergarten services were mentioned as well, which is an enormous problem especially for single parent families.

'If there's only one breadwinner in the family, the only way to manage the children is with the help of nursery schools or kindergartens. I don't really think there are enough of them.' (Lili, higher educated, aged 43, Hungary).

5.2.1 WOULD YOU DARE TO HAVE A CHILD ALONE?

As for whether they themselves would have had children alone, we received heterogeneous answers. Again, no differences were shown according to residence type or educational level, but rather according to age in Hungary. Members of the older generation believe that in their times they would have been scandalized, thus even if they could start their lives again they would make the same choices. However, if they could have a fresh start under the current social circumstances, they would decide to have children on their own in Hungary. In the Transylvanian sample women were less open-minded with this idea.

'I didn't think of that, I wouldn't have had the courage to do it alone. Those days it was still a very sensitive topic, single parenting was considered improper. And nowadays, if I was still young? I might decide differently. Moreover, I'm sure of it.' (Jusztika, 68, low educated)

'According to my view, and especially at that time, a family was supposed to be made up of two parents and their children. So one mother with her child was not a complete family... Well, today my opinion of that would probably be something else.' (Judit, 60, higher educated)

We found that those who refuse the idea of single parenting do not differentiate between biological or adopted children.

'A child should arrive into a relationship. I would definitely not want a child by myself. No, I haven't thought of adoption before. That also takes a couple, it's healthier that way.' (Zsuzsi, 45, higher educated, Hungary)

'You have the same sort of issues with a child be it either adopted or biologically your own, so I don't think it makes sense to have one alone.' (Evelin, 45, higher educated, Hungary)

Those who do not seclude themselves from having children alone and have no partners do not rule out the possibility of adoption either. Nevertheless they are aware of the disadvantages they would have compared to couples.

'I've always been interested in that, but I didn't have... And I heard that couples definitely had an advantage here, so I didn't think I should spend time on looking into the topic more deeply. But I often toyed with the idea.' (Gyöngyi, 50, low educated, Hungary)

'And then I opted for adoption and I did actually initiate the procedure, I mean the adoption procedure. But unfortunately [being single], I wasn't able to pull it through the Hungarian administration that time.' (Lili, 42, higher educated, Hungary).

In the Transylvanian sample most of the women stated that they would not dare to become single parents because they do not consider it as an ideal situation and they are more able to accept not having any children than having one alone. There was only one exception, a 40 year-old single woman with university degree who considers assisted reproduction as an option for her.

'I'd like to have a child so I'm seriously considering assisted reproduction' (Aliz, 40, university education, Transylvania).

5.3 Adoption by same sex couples

Surprisingly, attitudes to adoption by homosexual couples showed no difference according to social origin. Even low-educated respondents from the countryside in Hungary were permissive about the idea. It was rather in correlation with traditional views: respondents who found it important that a child has a mother and a father model were more dismissive.

'I really have nothing against it. I've always thought they're humans too. So why not? If they want a child.... and they could have one, then why shouldn't they? That's all. I mean it's such a dumb expression, so I'm not discriminative; it's their own right to make their choices I think.' (Gyöngyi, 50, low educated, Hungary)

'It's again such a degenerate thing, like, a woman raising either a boy or a girl all alone, or even worse, because what will that child see? That they're being raised by two women? Even if that child is a girl. I mean how does it look?' » (Marika, 50, secondary school education, Hungary).

In contrast, opinions in Transylvania are more reserved and permeated with hesitation due to the novelty of the phenomenon, thus they haven't formed their opinions yet or show a neutral attitude. Usually they argue that it is still better for a child to live in a family than in an orphanage.

'As an outsider I think a parentless child is still better off in the home of a same-sex couple than in an orphanage' (Tamara, 46, higher educated, Transylvania).

'For a child it's a thousand times better than growing up in an orphanage. But you just have to wait and see what opinions will emerge, as it is quite a new issue, but intuitively I would say it's okay.' (Eszter, 35, higher educated, Transylvania).

'I don't have the faintest idea. If I wanted to be politically correct, I could say I'm positive about it, but the truth is I've never had any relationship with such persons. So I'm not speaking from experience, only theoretically. I don't see any reason why they shouldn't be allowed to adopt children' (Lili, 36, higher educated, Transylvania).

In Transylvania it is also only a small minority who are definitely dismissive. Opponents again build their arguments on the idea that if a same-sex couple raises a child, the child will miss to see a father and a mother model, and one respondent distances herself on religious grounds.

'Well I don't disapprove of them, but I don't fully approve of the idea either.

That's because I think a child needs both a mother and a father, and I just don't believe either can substitute the other' (Márta, 35, secondary school education, Transylvania).

'That's a sin in front of God. It's what already happened in Sodom and Gomorrah leading to their destruction. I firmly condemn it; I condemn it as much as I possibly can. Because the judgement is not mine' (Orsolya, 40, secondary school education, Transylvania).

6 Summary

Childbearing is defined by various norms for example the one concerning age or expectations about the parents' financial situation. In the present study we only reviewed the norms regarding partnership and their evolution in Europe during the past two decades. We investigated social opinions about women choosing single parenthood, i.e. without having a relationship. We found crucial differences across Europe. In Romania for example attitudes are more liberal about

having children alone than in Hungary. Nevertheless, we assume that some of these differences are due to unclear question formation. Some respondents may have interpreted the question as one asking if it was proper of a mother to choose to raise her child alone after being left alone. Results gained from our interview survey also support this hypothesis. A lesson learned from the interview survey is that in Transylvania many did not understand how a single mother could have a child, thus considered instead extreme circumstances under which a woman remains alone and whether it is the right choice to raise her child on her own. In Hungary no such misinterpretation occurred.

In addition, the interviews also reflect that childless women in Hungary are more tolerant towards childbearing by single mothers than their Transylvanian peers. In their view women who dare to have children alone are brave in the first place, although admittedly they may be in great need of interpersonal relationships as well as an institutional network. Regarding this issue, in Transylvania the dimension of selfishness and the lack of a father model are more emphasized. Supporters again highlighted the significance of external help, by which they only meant family and relatives without mentioning any institutions.

The other topic of our interest was Europeans' opinions about adoption by same-sex couples. Just like the legal regulations, attitudes across Europe also show a great variety. We saw that respondents in the northern and western countries were more liberal than in the southern or eastern countries. This is also in harmony with the liberalization of legal regulations. In many northern and western countries gay and lesbian couples are allowed e.g. to adopt children or participate in ART as homosexual couples.

Based on the interview survey we can state that attitudes regarding adoption by same-sex couples show no difference according to social status. The issue is rather in connection with traditional attitudes regarding families. Respondents who claimed that maternal and paternal roles were equally crucial for raising children were less supportive of same-sex adoption. Moreover, in Transylvania many interviewees emphasized their uncertainty due to the novelty of this phenomenon and hence they could not formulate mature opinions. At the same time a unique argumentation also appeared saying a child might be better off if raised by a same-sex couple than in a public institution.

All in all the findings of the survey and interview analysis point out that fundamental changes are currently in progress in Europe and the correlation of childbearing and the evolution of relationships is going to be weaker and weaker. *

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