

THESIS SYNOPSIS

Boglárka Luca Herke

**Welfare Deservingness Perceptions of Single Mothers in Hungary:
Institutional Design, Government Discourse, and Public Attitudes**

Titled Doctoral Dissertation

Supervisor:

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Sociology and Social Sciences Department

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I. Research Background and Justification of the Topic

1. The Research Problem

Single-parent households form a group with one of the highest poverty risks in the European Union (Eurostat, 2020) and the OECD (OECD, 2018). The vast majority of these households are headed by women, whose poverty risk is even higher than that of single-father households, due to their lower level of income, higher share in part-time employment, and longer time on parental leaves (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016, pp. 1-2). Meanwhile, there is a significant variation between countries regarding the poverty rate of single-mother households that is highly dependent on welfare states' effort to support them. Previous studies show that welfare states that are the most effective in reducing the poverty rate of single-mother households, are those where universal social transfers are combined with targeted benefits towards single parents (Morissens, 2018; Van Lancker et al, 2015).

While benefits have a key role in reducing single-mother households' poverty risk, welfare states' intention to support single mothers is relevant also from a gender equality perspective. Single mothers, who have lower earning capacities, but more care responsibilities than men, uncover the hidden economic vulnerabilities of women that are invisible when women live in a traditional family. Women's capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household increases women's independence from men by making it possible for women to exit a marriage or to live alone, and also decreases the chance of domestic violence and patriarchal relations within relationships. Therefore, single mothers' state support is also seen as a litmus test of welfare states' efforts to promote gender equality (Hobson, 1994; Orloff, 1993).

Taking into account the high poverty risk of single-mother households, and the importance of their support from a gender equality perspective, what considerations that drive policymakers when deciding about the design and level of support towards single mothers, is a most relevant question. Previous studies examined welfare states' intention to support single mothers based on the overall design of the welfare systems, their attachment to the male-breadwinner model, and single mothers' access to paid work and childcare services (Duncan and Edwards, 1997; Hobson, 1994; Kilkey, 2000; Lewis, 1997; Millar, 1996). The role of perceived deservingness of single mothers is a less often analysed aspect, while public perceptions are also important components of policy formation.

Deserving groups are more likely to receive generous state support, than those with less positive perceptions, as the support of popular groups enjoy a higher level of social legitimacy

(Schneider and Ingram, 1993; van Oorschot and Roosma, 2017). Therefore, public perceptions of single mothers could also explain the form and level of their and, in general, single parents' state support. Meanwhile, the opinions of policymakers regarding groups' deservingness might also be different than public views, and they might aim to change public perceptions and gain social legitimacy for welfare reforms by framing groups as deserving or undeserving (Blum et al, 2019; Schneider and Ingram, 1993; Slothuus, 2007).

Previous literature on single mothers' welfare deservingness almost exclusively focuses on the 1990s United States and United Kingdom (e.g., Battle, 2019; Hancock, 2004; Phoenix, 1996), where politicians distorted single mothers' public image to legitimate welfare cuts of single mothers and to promote traditional family values. Political and media discourses framed single mothers as undeserving welfare recipients, who rationally selected single motherhood and welfare dependency instead of married life and paid work. Less attention has been paid to other welfare contexts, where single mothers' deservingness is not the main issue of the public discourse, but where less explicit discourses might also help to legitimize a low level of state support towards single-parent households.

Hungary serves an interesting case in this regard, as single mothers are not demonized in the public discourse, however, traditional family values and the deservingness of traditional families have been strongly advertised by the government since 2010. The government discourse in this case, therefore, only implicitly reflects on single mothers' deservingness, however, a shift in the benefit structure of single parents is also observable, as the level of targeting towards single parents decreased since 2010. The family allowance that has been providing an increased support to single mothers since the 1950s (and to single fathers from the late 1960s), has gradually been decreasing in value since 2008, as it has not been indexed with inflation. Meanwhile, the government introduced a tax credit system that provides a higher amount of reduction for those with a higher tax base and with more children, which, however, does not provide a higher level of reduction for single-parent families. By these changes, the government challenges the long-standing and stable tradition of single parents' state support, and also, the principle that single parents deserve more help than two-parent households. Decreasing the level of targeting means less protection for single parents (and especially for single mothers) against poverty, and reduces single mothers' chance to form and maintain an autonomous household.

It is a question in this context, whether the rhetoric on the importance of traditional family values could legitimize the decreasing level of state support towards single parents. To explore

the social legitimacy of these changes, the dissertation investigates the public attitudes towards single mothers' welfare deservingness. Moreover, the thesis applies a complex research design, and investigates not only the public attitudes, but also the factors that could shape it, such as the historical-institutional design of single mothers' benefits, the public image of single mothers, the deservingness perceptions of single mothers based on special criteria, and the government discourse on the family. The dissertation assumes that all of these factors shape public attitudes towards single mothers' state support (i.e., single mothers' perceived welfare deservingness), and it also acknowledges that these factors mutually form each other. The dissertation, therefore, also explores how attitudes could influence the formation of policies and discourses.

Furthermore, the thesis applies a comparative perspective regarding the factors that make it possible, and investigates single mothers' welfare deservingness in Hungary in contrast to the UK and US. The comparison is relevant not only because of the diverse discourses but also due to the different historical-institutional designs of these countries. The investigation of the historical-institutional design of single mothers' state support in (post)socialist Hungary compared to the capitalist UK and US provides an excellent case to nuance knowledge regarding how socialist versus capitalist countries fostered gender equality in the 20th century. While in Western feminist literature, Eastern European countries are often labelled as belated in terms of gender equality due to the forced equalizing process of socialist states (e.g., Jung, 1994; Olsen, 1997; Slavova, 2006, p. 248), single mothers' state support might provide a case which highlights that socialist states were indeed much ahead in fostering gender equality compared to some capitalist countries.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Social Legitimacy of Targeted Welfare – Theories and Approaches of Welfare Deservingness Research

Three leading approaches developed during the past decades in the research of social legitimacy of targeted welfare (van Oorschot and Roosma, 2017). The first one examines the institutional design of the benefits and states that the institutional characteristics of benefits and welfare regimes, in general, determine the attitudes towards benefit groups. A general finding in this literature is that more universal systems (social-democratic and conservative ones) usually have greater social legitimacy than selective ones (liberal welfare regimes), as, in the latter one, there is a strong social gap between reciprocators and beneficiaries (e.g., Korpi, 1980; Rothstein

1998). The institutional approach, however, does not necessarily connect the attitudes to “macro-level” welfare regimes, but it could investigate the attitudes related to the “meso-level” benefit schemes (e.g., Laenen, 2018; van Oorschot et al, 2017). The general finding, in this case, is again that more universal benefits have a higher level of social legitimacy than less universal (selective) benefits (Goodin and Le Grand, 1987; Skocpol 1991).

The second approach concentrates on the public image of the target group and claims that benefits targeting groups with more positive public images have a higher level of social legitimacy (Schneider and Ingram, 1993; van Oorschot and Roosma, 2017, p. 10). The literature mostly relied on the application of this approach, when it was hypothesized that a group under investigation has such a negative public image that could negatively influence groups’ perceived deservingness.

The third approach investigates the perceived deservingness of the group based on five criteria (control, attitude, reciprocity, identity, and need) (van Oorschot, 2000), and states that benefits targeting groups with more positive scores on the criteria have a higher level of social legitimacy. Compared to public image research, this approach does not only focus on the stereotypical characteristics of the target group but investigates groups’ deservingness based on five criteria, called “CARIN”. The first component is control, which refers to the responsibility of the group for their needy situation. “A” stands for attitude, more precisely, it defines the attitude of claimants towards their received support. The next component is reciprocity, as a group’s perceived deservingness also relies on the level of the groups’ perceived contribution to the work of the welfare system. Identity, as the fourth component, emphasizes the gap between the target group and the public, and assumes that people find those groups more deserving, who are similar to them based on particular aspects (e.g., nationality or social norms). Finally, need is the most evident criterion, as it defines the perceived level of need.

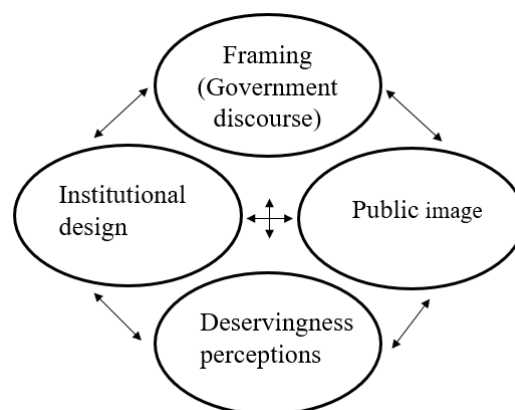
The importance of deservingness perceptions is further supported by the “deservingness heuristic” (Petersen, 2012; Petersen et al, 2011). Based on this theory, people decide differently about recipients’ deservingness when specific information is available. The deservingness heuristic is an automatic procedure developed during evaluation to differentiate reciprocators from cheaters. Recipients who demonstrated low effort to avoid requiring others’ help are categorized as “cheaters”, while recipients who showed high effort (and consequently also demonstrated a willingness to contribute to the work of the community), but are still in need of help are categorized as “reciprocators”. The heuristic, therefore, drives people’s attention to the perceptions of control and reciprocity. The automaticity of the heuristic implies that people

disregard their values and stereotypes pertaining to the target group if enough information on the recipient is available, and people with and without related knowledge produce consistent judgments.

Besides the above presented three approaches, political framing (a process of suggesting a way of thinking regarding a policy problem) (Sloothus, 2007, pp. 325-326) could also be important in the formation of benefits' social legitimacy. While there is a link between policies and the deservingness of target groups (i.e., more deserving groups receive more generous benefits than undeserving groups), politicians might aim to change the status quo and cut back or increase the benefits of target groups due to several reasons (e.g., economic or ideological) (Schneider and Ingram, 1993). In these cases, political elites need to frame welfare change in a way to make it acceptable by the public. One strategy is to frame welfare state change based on the (un)deservingness of the target group (Esmark and Schoop, 2017; Schneider and Ingram, 1993; Sloothus, 2007).

Welfare attitudes, therefore, have a function in legitimating welfare policies, and the support of benefits targeted toward groups are influenced by the institutional design of the benefits, the public image, and the perceived deservingness of the target group. Furthermore, political elites could legitimate changes in welfare policies by framing target groups as deserving or undeserving. This dissertation uses all these approaches to arrive at a complex understanding of the formation of welfare attitudes towards single mothers in Hungary. Figure 1 shows these approaches and the interrelations between them.

Figure 1. Approaches to investigate the social legitimacy of targeted welfare and interrelations between the approaches



2.2. Single Mothers' Perceived Welfare Deservingness Based on the Deservingness Criteria

Earlier works have not examined the weights of the deservingness criteria in the case of single mothers, however, there is some connecting research evidence. First, regarding the need criterion, Groskind (1991) found in a vignette-based survey experiment, that compared to two-parent families, where the father's work status and effort to find a job (reciprocity and control criteria) were the most important, the number of children and the weekly income (both reflecting on the need criterion) were the most influential factors when US respondents evaluated the deservingness of single-mother families. In the case of single mothers, the mother's work status and effort to find a job were even less important predictors than the absent father's work status and effort, and the marital status of the mother (reflecting also on the control criterion) was not a significant predictor. The role of the need criterion is also supported by the results of Roosma and Jeene (2017), who found that Dutch survey respondents showed more leniency regarding benefit obligations in the case of those single parents who had younger children (higher level of need).

Other studies, however, highlight the importance of control criterion. Control is often understood as the responsibility for being alone with the children, which is usually measured by the marital status of the single mother. While widows cannot be blamed for living alone with their children, divorced and never-married single mothers are frequently seen as responsible for their situation (Battle, 2019, p. 599). For instance, in American new poverty discourses of the 1980s, the narrators exclusively blamed single mothers, except for the worthy widows (Fineman 1991). Furthermore, van Oorschot (2000, p. 38) found at the end of the 1990s, that groups facing one of the acknowledged social risks have a higher score on the deservingness criteria. One of the investigated social risks was widowhood, besides being sick or disabled or being a pensioner. More recent research findings show that the perceived responsibility of becoming a single mother is still an important criterion. Baumberg et al. (2012, p. 26) found that British focus group participants ranked single parents as more deserving in cases where their partner had left them, while those who intentionally selected single parenthood were judged as less deserving.

There is also evidence about the importance of the other three deservingness criteria, but it is related to government and public discourses, and not public attitudes. The American welfare discourse of the 1990s was interwoven with the 'welfare queen' stereotype. Single mothers on welfare were depicted as Black (identity), lazy (control), promiscuous (identity) women from

the lower classes (identity), who received more of the taxpayers' money than they were entitled to (attitude) (Gilman, 2014, pp. 259-260; Monnat, 2010). Class-based stereotypes regarding single mothers who do not like to work and do not work (low level of control and reciprocity) were also very salient in the welfare discourse of the 1990s in the UK, where single motherhood was strongly connected to teenage pregnancy as well (Duncan and Edwards, 1999, pp. 28-31). The latter one simultaneously reflected on the identity and reciprocity criteria, as teenage motherhood was seen as a form of parenting that deviates from middle-class norms (identity), while it was also associated with welfare dependency (low level of reciprocity) (Wilson and Huntington, 2006).

3. Aims of the Dissertation and Relevance of the Aims

The dissertation has three major aims. First, it aims to investigate the relation between the attitudes of the public towards single mothers' deservingness and the current benefit structure of single parents in Hungary, to evaluate the social legitimacy of single parents' decreasing level of targeting in family policy. Meanwhile, the dissertation aims to investigate not only the public attitudes, but also the factors that could shape it, such as the historical-institutional design of single mothers' benefits, the contemporary government discourse on the family, the public image of single mothers, and single mothers' perceptions based on the five deservingness criteria. Moreover, as the thesis acknowledges that these factors could mutually shape each other, it also intends to explore the interrelations between these factors.

Second, it aims to compare the deservingness of single mothers in the UK, US, and Hungary, to initiate the comparative research in this field. Third, it purposes to explore the determinants of single mothers' perceived deservingness by applying the major theories (CARIN and deservingness heuristic) in the field of deservingness research.

Thus, the first aim is to add relevance to the perspective of Hungarian social policy by focusing on the legitimacy of the current system of single parents' benefits. Furthermore, this aim has relevance also regarding the research of the social legitimacy of targeted welfare. It provides a complex empirical investigation on the formation of attitudes towards a group's targeted welfare, based on all of those approaches that proved to be relevant in previous research.

The second aim has relevance in comparative social policy as the study provides insights regarding a quite different welfare context than the one present in the literature (US and UK). Furthermore, the comparison is beneficial due to the diverse history of these countries. Single mothers' position in socialist Hungary shed light on the progressiveness of the socialist state

regarding gender equality compared to the UK and US. The dissertation, therefore, also aims to contribute to comparative feminist social policy literature. The third aim has theoretical relevance regarding deservingness research, as the thesis explores the determinants of perceived deservingness based on the major deservingness theories in the case of a previously not-investigated group, single mothers.

4. Structure of the Dissertation and Research Questions

The chapters are structured in a way that each focuses on one direction of deservingness research (institutional design, public image, deservingness perceptions) and one investigates the family discourse of the Hungarian government (framing). Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 could be regarded as contextual chapters, as they don't especially investigate the attitudes of the public, but rather the historical-institutional and discursive context of single mothers' welfare deservingness in Hungary. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 focus on the attitudes of the public towards single mothers' welfare deservingness.

Chapter 2 investigates the institutional background of single mothers' deservingness by evaluating the historical-institutional differences in single mothers' state support in Hungary, the US, and the UK. This chapter, therefore, mainly relates to the comparative aim of the thesis, and poses the following research questions: *“What are the major historical differences in the design of single mothers' state support in Hungary, the UK, and the US? What ideas shaped these designs? How did these differences pave the way for connected reforms and discourses? How these different welfare regimes fostered gender equality?”*

Chapter 3 analyses the discourse of the Hungarian government on the family to reveal how the discourse on the importance of traditional family values reflects on single-parent families' deservingness. The chapter's research question is: *“To what extent, and how, does the government discourse frame single-parent families as less deserving compared to traditional (two-parent) families?”*

In Chapter 4, the focus is on the public image of single mothers, its connection to the deservingness criteria, and the link between public attitudes and family policy. This chapter, therefore, mainly aims to achieve the goal related to Hungarian social policy, and asks *“How the Hungarian public sees single mothers and to what extent are their public image and perceived deservingness in line with single-parent families' low level of targeting in family policies?”*

Chapter 5 especially focuses on the determinants of single mothers' perceived deservingness in Hungary, and approaches its investigation based on two theories (CARIN and deservingness heuristic), and therefore it is related to the third aim of the dissertation. First, it explores the weights of the CARIN criteria in Hungary, and second, it evaluates the importance of these criteria in the presence, and absence, of specific deservingness cues. The chapter's research questions are the following: "*Which CARIN criteria explain single mothers' welfare deservingness in Hungary?*" and second "*To what extent do the weights of the deservingness criteria regarding single mothers vary in the presence and absence of specific deservingness cues?*"

II. Methodology

The dissertation does not build on one dataset but applies several data sources and various methods (mixed methods) that are suitable to each research question. Chapter 2 reviews the history of single mothers' benefits in the US, the UK, and Hungary, and it applies a comparative literature review. The other three chapters use empirical data. Chapter 3 investigates the government discourse and aims to explore how it communicates single parents' deservingness and the extent to which it frames single-parent families as less deserving than traditional families. To answer these questions, the chapter applies frame and critical discourse analyses (CDA). First, the chapter analyses the broad frame (on the importance of traditional family values) within the government's communication, and evaluates how it reflects on single parents' deservingness. Second, the chapter investigates separately the discourse on traditional families and the discourse on single-parent families with CDA. It compares how these separate discourses frame single parents' deservingness, and the extent to which they reinforce single parents' less deserving position compared to traditional families. For these purposes, speeches of government members connected to the topic were collected from the government's website, and additional speeches related to single parenthood were also collected.

Chapter 4 investigates the public image and perceived deservingness of single mothers. Open-ended and closed-ended survey questions are used to explore both the public image and perceived deservingness of the group. First, the public image of single mothers is explored with an open-ended question, and then it is validated by closed-ended questions. Second, based on the qualitative data, I operationalize the CARIN criteria in the case of single mothers, and formulate statements to measure them. The deservingness criteria are operationalized by the following five statements: "*Most single mothers are responsible for remaining with their*

child/children alone” (control) “*Most single mothers demand too much support from the government*” (attitude) “*Most single mothers work hard to make a living for the family*” (control & reciprocity), “*Single motherhood is not an uncommon situation.*” (identity) “*Most single mothers have a bad financial situation.*” (need). In addition, there is a statement, which measures the overall deservingness of single mothers: “*It’s a role of the state to support single mothers*” (overall deservingness).

In this chapter, therefore, the different data collections are built upon each other, using a mixed method approach. While most of the datasets are based on quota samples of adult internet users (varying from 500 to 1000 respondents), some of the questions are asked on both quota and representative samples (1000 respondents), providing robustness checks for the results.

Chapter 5 explores the relative importance of the deservingness criteria in predicting single mothers’ deservingness. Relying on the theory of Petersen et al. (2011), the chapter uses two different methods. The theory of the deservingness heuristics states that people judge recipients’ deservingness differently when more concrete cues are available about recipients’ deservingness. Therefore, this chapter applies two popular methods of deservingness research: one measures deservingness in the presence of deservingness cues, and one, in the absence of deservingness cues. First, to measure the role of the deservingness criteria in the absence of specific cues, the chapter uses the statements that are used also in Chapter 4, and the relative weights of the criteria are explored with regression analysis of these statements; within a statement measuring the overall deservingness of the group (*It’s a role of the state to support single mothers*) serves as the dependent variable. Second, for the investigation of the perceived deservingness of single mothers in the presence of deservingness cues, a vignette-based factorial survey experiment is used. The deservingness criteria are translated into characteristics of hypothetical single mothers (specific deservingness cues), and the dependent variable is the perceived fairness of the amount of family allowance of hypothetical single mothers.

Both the statements and the experiment were embedded in a larger survey which was asked on a 2000 respondent large quota sample of Hungarian adult internet users. The sample was selected from the respondent panel of one of the largest Hungarian polling firms, NRC. The sample was split at that point in the survey, where the blocks and the experiment would follow. Consequently, both sets of the six survey items, and the survey experiment were asked from approximately 1000 respondents with one of the two versions was randomly assigned to each respondent. The sample is similar to the Hungarian population regarding gender and settlement

type, however, the lower educated, and the younger segments of the population, are underrepresented. Sampling weights were used in the analyses to correct for these differences.

In the experiment, the characteristics of the hypothetical mother varied randomly between the vignettes based on their age (reciprocity), ethnicity (identity), marital status (control), number of children (need), employment status (reciprocity), level of income (need), amount of received maintenance/orphan's allowance (need), and their gratefulness to the state for the received support (attitude). Each of these characteristics had two, three, or four categories. On the whole, the vignette universe covered 576 possible combinations of all characteristics ($2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3 \times 3 \times 4$). From this universe, 100 vignettes were selected with a random sampling technique (without replacement). These vignettes were sorted randomly into ten distinct vignette decks, and all of them contained ten vignettes. Vignette decks were assigned to the respondents randomly, and the order of the vignettes also varied between respondents.

To account for the incoherent family values of the Hungarian population that might affect the role of the identity criterion, additional statements were added to the questionnaire, and were used as control variables in both measurements: *"It is all right for a couple with an unhappy marriage to get a divorce even if they have children,"* *"A woman can have a child as a single parent even if she doesn't want to have a stable relationship with a man,"* *"A child needs a home with both a father and a mother to grow up happily."*

III. Results

1. Results Regarding Hungarian Social Policy – The Social Legitimacy of Single Mothers’ Targeted Welfare in Hungary

Chapter 2 showed that single mothers’ state support has a long-standing and stable tradition in the Hungarian family policy system. Their most important form of support, the family allowance, was founded at the beginning of the 20th century, and working single mothers became entitled as their right in the 1950s. From that time, single mothers (from the 1960s, single fathers as well) received a higher allowance than two-parent families. Single parents’ higher level of support remained stable during the years of socialism and also after the regime change (with varying levels of exact support though). This stability in the system shows also stability in the perception of single parents’ deservingness. This finding is further supported by the quasi-universal design of family allowance (it was tied to employment in socialism, however, due to full-employment, it was available for almost every family) and also by the fact that single mothers remained included in this system after the regime change as well.

Chapter 3 showed that the government discourse on the importance of traditional family values frames the alternative family types in general (also single-parent families) as harmful for the nation by causing demographic decline. This frame also explicitly states that the solution to the problem is the increased birth rate that could be achieved by the advertisement of traditional family values and the support of traditional families through the benefit system. In this frame, therefore, traditional families are clearly the deserving ones, while other types of families are seen as less deserving. Single-parent families, however, are not explicitly vilified, and they are not claimed as undeserving in the government’s direct communication on single-parent families. They are rather described as accepted, but less healthy, “second-class” families compared to traditional ones. The message is that single-parenthood needs to be prevented, and in line with this, single-parent families are seen as deserving, but less deserving families than traditional families.

Chapter 4 investigated the social legitimacy of single mothers’ state support by analysing single mothers’ perceived deservingness based on their public image and deservingness perceptions. The public image of single mothers was investigated by open-ended survey questions, where respondents were asked to provide their associations regarding single mothers and single mothers’ life. The results of this task showed that single mothers are seen as poor mothers, who do everything to make a living for their family and who lack emotional and financial state

support. Within this image, the strongest characteristic (most often emphasized) was their poverty. Besides this deserving public image, respondents, however, similarly often emphasized the incompleteness of these families by referring to the lack of the other parent. These two characteristics, therefore, touch upon two deservingness criteria, need, and identity. How single mothers are perceived is positive based on the need criterion, as they are seen as poor and needy. Regarding the identity criterion, the perception is not that positive, as the answers emphasized that these families are different from the preferred two-parent family form.

The investigation of single mothers' perceived deservingness based on attitude questions, also underlined these findings. On the one hand, the large majority of respondents (almost 80%) agreed with the statement that most single mothers have a bad financial situation. On the other hand, the respondents were most divided regarding the statement measuring identity, "*Single motherhood is not an uncommon situation,*", as only half of them agreed with it. However, the results also showed that besides single mothers' lower score on the identity criterion, 80% of the respondents agreed with the statement, that "*It's a role of the state to support single mothers,*" These results, therefore, show that despite the public's alignment with the government's conservative family ideal (two-parent (married) one), they also find single mothers deserving of state support. It could be explained by the positive scores of single mothers on four of five deservingness criteria (the only exception is the identity criterion), and also by the incoherent family values of the population. On the one hand, it is quite conservative regarding the importance of marriage and the need of both parents, while on the other hand, it is quite liberal regarding the acceptance of divorce.

Chapter 5 approached the social legitimacy of single mothers' state support by investigating attitudes towards the design of the benefits. A vignette-based factorial survey experiment was used within which the respondents were asked to evaluate the fairness of the amount of the family allowance of hypothetical single mothers. First, respondents found those mothers who had one child, and who received a lower level of support, more deserving, compared to those mothers who had three children and received a higher level of support after each of their children. Consequently, respondents do not share the pronatalist idea that the government should give a higher amount of allowance per child in larger families. Second, respondents did not differentiate between the deservingness of employed and unemployed single mothers, therefore, it suggests that they do not share the idea that single mothers' benefits should be tied to employment. Third, as respondents have found single mothers with both lower levels of income and maintenance/orphan's pension more deserving, it shows that the benefits of single

mothers should be based more on their financial need. On the whole, these results show that the attitudes are not so much in line with recent changes in the family policy system that gave higher weight to income-based benefits (tax credit) that favour the better-off working families. Respondents would prefer to support a benefit system that is not tied to working status and which would help those single mothers more who have poorer financial circumstances.

The results of Chapters 2, 4, and 5 all point to the same direction. Namely, that single mothers' state support enjoys a high level of social legitimacy in Hungary. It is highlighted by the historical-institutional context within their benefits were (quasi) universal and remained quite stable over time. Furthermore, it is supported by single mothers' positive public image, their positive scores on four of five deservingness criteria, and their high level of overall deservingness. The supportive attitudes of the public, and the long-standing, stable design of single parents' benefits, also seem to explain the more cautious communication of the government on single parenthood compared to other alternative forms of families (Chapter 3), as well as the less salient strategy of decreasing targeted welfare towards single parents. These results also highlight that there are important interrelations between the investigated factors. The high level of social legitimacy of single mothers' state support, however, shows that recent changes in the family policy system, which reduced targeting towards single parents are not much supported by the public (even though the public also prefers the traditional family), who would even increase their level of support (based on the results of the vignette-based survey experiment). More specifically, the shift towards income-based benefits is not supported, while a benefit system that would target poorer single mothers, would enjoy a higher level of social legitimacy.

2. Results Regarding Comparative Social Policy Research

Chapter 2 showed that single mothers' benefits had developed quite differently in Hungary compared to the US and UK in the 20th century. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, single mothers were included in assistance-based benefit schemes, while in Hungary, working single mothers were included in the family allowance scheme within which they received an increased level of support. This difference in the design was a consequence of the diverse perceptions of single mothers in the examined countries. In Hungary, single mothers similar to other mothers under socialism, were seen as working mothers. In contrast, in the UK and US, policymakers perceived single mothers as non-employable citizens due to their commitment towards the male-breadwinner model. Furthermore, in the UK and US, widowed single mothers, who were

perceived as more deserving, were included in the social security scheme and more often received assistance-based support than separated, divorced, or never-married single mothers. In Hungary, the system has not differentiated between single mothers based on their marital status.

Based on these institutional characteristics, there were no strong obstacles to reform the systems during the 1990s in the UK and the US. Assistance-based benefits are usually supported to a lesser extent than more universal benefits. The male-breadwinner model was becoming increasingly outdated due to the rising female employment rate of coupled mothers, and the majority of single mothers were no longer widow but divorced/separated/never-married. Moreover, the reforms in these countries were supported by public discourses (government and media) on single mothers' undeservingness. Single mothers were described in these discourses as a social and economic threat by rationally selecting single motherhood and state dependency over married life and paid work. The advertisement of traditional family values was an important component of these discourses such as it is in the discourse of the Hungarian government in the 2010s. Meanwhile, in Hungary, the government discourse focuses on the advertisement of traditional family values, and single mothers are not demonized (but described as second-rank families compared to traditional families). This discourse also fits the historical-institutional context, as in Hungary, single mothers were perceived as a deserving group, therefore, a negative discourse on single mothers' deservingness would not enjoy a high level of social legitimacy.

Chapter 2 also shed light on the progressiveness of socialist Hungary compared to the capitalist UK and US in promoting gender equality. While in Western feminist literature, Eastern European countries are often labelled as belated in terms of gender equality due to the forced equalizing process of socialist states, single mothers' state support provides a case which highlights that socialist states were indeed much ahead in fostering gender equality regarding some aspects of everyday life of women compared to Western countries. The liberal legal environment as well as employment and benefit policies in socialist Hungary, all contributed to gender equality, as women could have left undesired relationships without legal stigmatization, and the state also increased women's capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household. The environment was less women-friendly in the UK and US, where no-fault divorce was introduced much later, and where single mothers' employment was not facilitated either through childcare services, or through employment policies. What is more, they lost assistance-based benefits when they had paid work, which often provided only slightly better income compared to social assistance.

Chapter 4 investigated the public image of single mothers in Hungary. While the exact comparison of this image, with the ones present in the 1990s the UK and US, was not feasible due to methodological constraints, the chapter rather used the Anglo-Saxon cases as a background of the research. The methodological constraints were that the studies investigating the US and UK focused on the analysis of the public discourse while the investigation of Hungary was based on survey data. Nevertheless, the results showed that single mothers have a deserving public image in Hungary, which is quite in contrast with the undeserving ones in the US and UK.

The image of single mothers contained undeserving characteristics based on four criteria in the US and three in the UK. As these images were fuelled by the social threat discourse, both of them represented single mothers as responsible for their situation by rationally selecting single motherhood and state benefits (high level of personal control), who are reproducing poverty and state dependency (low level of reciprocity). In the American and British discourses, single mothers were presented as being promiscuous women from the “underclass,” who were teenagers (UK) and Black (US). These characteristics showed a lower level of deservingness regarding the identity criterion by referring to social distance between single mothers and the mainstream society regarding sexual and parenting norms, class position, and race. Furthermore “welfare queens” in the US were also described as cheating women who get out more from the system than what they deserve.

In contrast, based on the Hungarian public image, single mothers are perceived as poor mothers (high level of need) who work a lot to make a living for their family (high level of reciprocity). The public image of single mothers in Hungary is also not connected to identity categories such as class or ethnicity. Single-mother families, however, are also perceived as incomplete ones that show a lower score on identity.

On the whole, the results of Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 showed that Hungary is a quite different case regarding single mothers’ welfare deservingness than the US and UK, and that it could be explained by historical differences in the design of the benefits and ideas that shaped the formation of it. While the connected discourses advertised traditional family values in all of these three countries, single mothers could not be demonized in Hungary compared to the Anglo-Saxon countries, as they were perceived as deserving in the past. They are also perceived as deserving by the public in contemporary Hungary, even though the traditional family is still the preferred family type.

3. Results Regarding Deservingness Research

Chapter 5 investigated the determinants of single mothers' deservingness in Hungary based on two major deservingness theories (CARIN (van Oorschot, 2000) & deservingness heuristic (Petersen et al, 2011) and by using two different methods (regression analysis of statements and a vignette-based survey experiment). The results showed that in the absence of deservingness cues, respondents relied on the attitude, reciprocity/control, identity, and need criteria to the same extent. Therefore, in Hungary, people see single mothers as deserving based on beliefs about single mothers' strong work ethic, non-demanding attitude and neediness. Furthermore, liberal values regarding divorce, but also conservative views regarding a child's need of both parents explain single mothers' deservingness. In contrast, when the deservingness of single mothers was measured in the presence of concrete deservingness cues, the perception of single mothers' neediness became the strongest predictor, and the direct effects of perceived attitude and reciprocity, as well as family values, disappeared. These results support the existence of the deservingness heuristic, as people disregarded their stereotypes and values when more concrete information regarding single mothers' deservingness was available. In the case of single mothers, the heuristic, however, directed people's attention towards the perception of financial need, that is, in contrast with previous results showing the importance of control and reciprocity criteria in the case of the unemployed and social assistance beneficiaries.

This result suggests a gender-related bias in the work of the deservingness heuristic, more concretely that perceived effort and reciprocity are less important in the case of mothers, as their traditional role is to take care of their children and not to make a living for the family. This mechanism is also supported by a previous experiment (Groskind, 1991). First, Groskind found the same result regarding single mothers (i.e., the perception of need was the most important criterion), and second, his results also demonstrated that in the case of two-parent families, the deservingness heuristic worked similar to other target groups, as the fathers' work status (reciprocity) and effort to find work (control) were the most important characteristics. Moreover, this gender-related understanding of the deservingness heuristic is further underlined by the finding that the amount of father's child support was an even more important predictor of perceived deservingness than the income of the mother in the current survey experiment. To sum up, it seems that while in the case of other target groups the deservingness heuristic directs people's attention to the perception of control and reciprocity, in the case of single mothers, traditional gender roles overwrite this mechanism, and directs people's attention towards the perception of need instead of the perception of control and reciprocity.

Furthermore, the priority of the need criterion over control regarding single mothers' deservingness in the Hungarian context is also supported, as need explained deservingness also in the absence of deservingness cues, while control (in the sense that being responsible for remaining with children alone) had not explained it in any of the measurements. Meanwhile, as the results showed, the understanding of the control criterion was varied between respondents (in both measurements). In the regression analysis of statements, results showed that some groups (i.e., men and older respondents) were more likely to find single mothers deserving if they believed that most of the mothers are responsible for becoming a single mother. This result is in contrast to the deservingness theory, which claims that groups perceived as responsible for their situation are less likely to be seen deserving in the eyes of the public. One possible explanation for this surprising result is that these groups think in a more traditional way regarding gender relations, and because of it, they believe that when single mothers are not responsible, then fathers should help them and not the state. This result shows that to understand the role of control criterion in the case of single mothers, it is inevitable to include perceptions regarding fathers' responsibility as well.

The mixed results of the other three criteria in the two different measurements also show that people find importance in different kinds of information in the presence and absence of specific deservingness cues. These differences show that conclusions on the importance of the deservingness criteria in predicting groups' deservingness based on one measurement should be carefully drawn. Moreover, these different kinds of measurements provide information for different purposes. Investigating the deservingness of a group in the absence of deservingness cues could be useful in exploring the overall social legitimacy of the groups' state support, and to explore what perceptions drive this attitude. For designing benefits in a socially legitimate way, however, it might be more useful to apply context-specific methods. Based on these, it is clearer how the system should differentiate between members of the target groups, who could still vary in many aspects from each other.

To conclude, results showed that need is an important criterion in the case of single mothers' perceived deservingness in Hungary, while attitude, reciprocity (and control in the sense of having control over the current situation), and identity also explained single mothers' deservingness in one of the two measurements. Furthermore, the results also showed that the preference for the traditional family does not necessarily cause a low level of single mothers' perceived deservingness. Indeed, respondents holding the belief that a child needs both a mother and a father to live a happy life, are more likely to find single mothers deserving, compared to

those who do not agree with this statement. Single mothers, therefore, are perceived as deserving in Hungary, because they seem poor, not demanding, and hardworking, but also because divorce is accepted by the large majority of the public, and because the widely shared perception that a child needs both parents to live a happy life predicts the deservingness and not the undeservingness of single mothers.

IV. References

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V. List of Publications Connected to the Topic of the Dissertation

Articles in Peer-Reviewed Journals

- Herke, B. (2021): Investigating the Welfare Deservingness of Single Mothers: Public Image and Deservingness Perceptions in Hungary. *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures*. 35(3), 613-637. DOI: 10.1177/0888325420937773
- Herke, B., Janky, B. (2021): The Role of the CARIN Deservingness Criteria in the Case of Single Mothers' Perceived Welfare Deservingness in Hungary. *Journal of Social Policy*. (accepted for publication)

Book Review in Peer-Reviewed Journal

- Herke, B., Samu, F. (2019): Wim van Oorschot, Femke Roosma, Bart Meuleman and Tim Reeskens (eds) (2017), *The Social Legitimacy of Targeted Welfare: Attitudes to Welfare Deservingness*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. *Journal of Social Policy*, 48(3), 648-650. DOI: 10.1017/S0047279419000503

Conference Presentations in English

- Herke, B. (2019): The Role of the (CARIN) Deservingness Criteria in the case of Single Mothers' Welfare Deservingness. The 6th International Conference of Social Policy ESPAnet Poland 2019. Warsaw, Poland, 27 September 2019.
- Herke, B. (2019): Investigating the Welfare Deservingness of Single Mothers: Public Image and Deservingness Perceptions in Hungary. ESPAnet NL-VL Young Researchers Day. KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium, 29 May 2019.
- Herke, B. (2018): Investigating The Public Image of Single Mothers Outside Liberal Welfare Regimes - A Case Study of Hungary. The Challenges of Future to the Social Sciences, International PhD Conference. Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Budapest, Hungary, 25 September 2018.

Conference Presentations in Hungarian

- Herke, B. (2018): "Az egyedülálló anyák megítélése és jóléti érdemességük Magyarországon" [The Perception of Single Mothers and their Welfare Deservingness in Hungary]. Magyar Szociológiai Társaság 2018. évi vándorgyűlése [Annual Meeting of the Hungarian Sociological Association]. Szeged, University of Szeged, Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education. 19 October 2018.