



**Sociology Doctoral  
School**

## **THESES**

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**Leaving the Parental Home in Hungary**  
Timing, Partnership Context and Differences  
by Family Background

Ph.D. dissertation

**Supervisor:**

**Prof. Utasi Ágnes DSc**

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**Institute of Sociology and Social Policy**

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# 1. Aim and Background

## *1.1. Theoretical Background*

Establishing one's own household is an important life course event during the "demographically dense" (Rindfuss 1991) period of young adulthood. Leaving the family of origin and creating an independent life are important steps in the process of taking on adult roles (Modell et al. 1976; Hogan – Astone 1986; George 1993).

Young adults may leave the parental home with different aims and under different circumstances. This event is often linked to partnership trajectories, and moving out often involves moving in with a – married or unmarried – partner. Besides, nest-leaving may be motivated by reasons of education, employment, the desire to lead an independent life or to get away from a conflictful family (Mulder et al. 2002.).

We utilize four theoretical approaches in relation to the transition to adulthood and leaving the parental home: life course theory, macro structural approaches, the theory of the second demographic transition, and the concepts of social capital and the transmission of parental resources.

Theoretical approaches that aim at explaining the timing of home-leaving often depart from the life course paradigm (White 1994). Life course perspective claims that demographic, social and cultural factors work together in influencing family life. This approach focuses

on the changes in the roles and position of individuals within their families and households as experienced during life course transitions. It is also worth studying how these changes are shaped by the social, economic and cultural circumstances of a given historical time in a specific geographical place, how the changes are affected by other people and how the changes affect others. Previous life course events and experiences have long-lasting effects on the life of individuals. The life course trajectories of the members of a family are closely connected to each another. The person who experiences the role transition affects and is also affected by others (Elder et al. 2004; Mac-Millar – Copher 2005).

When explaining cross-country differences and historical change, macro structural approaches refer to economic, legal and demographic structures (White 1994). The deep political and economic transformations after 1989-1990 have changed the entire context that young people face in Hungary and East-Central Europe (Macura et al 2000). The economic crisis, financial and employment uncertainties had several demographic consequences: fertility radically dropped, entry into parenthood became postponed, the rate of extra-marital births increased, marriage lost its popularity and non-married cohabitation became widespread. Unemployment, the lack of permanent employment and the financially unstable position of young adults and their parents also postponed the timing of establishing an independent household and gaining financial independence (Beck – Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

The most common theoretical framework for explaining demographic change that started in the mid-1960s is the concept of second demographic transition. According to the theory, changes in family life, partnership and fertility behaviour has basically been brought about by value changes. Traditional values, transmitted by local and religious communities, have weakened and got replaced by the values of self-realization and self-fulfilment. The emphasis has shifted from the family to the individual. The quality of relationships has become an important requirement and the expectations towards partners have been raised. As a result of these value changes, people prefer life choices that require less commitment: unmarried unions and living-apart-together relationships are preferred over marriage, and childbearing is postponed (Lesthaeghe 1995, 2010; Lesthaeghe—Moore 2000; van de Kaa 1987).

The theory of the second demographic transition would predict that people leave the parental home at younger and younger ages, because they try to achieve autonomy as soon as possible and they would like to be independent from their parents. This way they will get out of parental control and they will become free to decide about the life they want to live. Moreover, home-leaving is a reversible decision; many can and do return later. Thus leaving the parental home involves relatively low level of risk-taking. The theory states that, owing to the postponement of partnership and family formation, there is a period during young adulthood when people lives away from the

parents, with friends or alone. The events of nest-leaving and the start of the first cohabiting partnership become separated in time.

Theories about the intergeneration transmission of resources also help to understand differences in home-leaving behaviour. Parental resources can be grouped into material and immaterial, transferable and non-transferable ones. The income and wealth of the parents belong to the easily transferable material resources. Values, preferences and cultural capital are non-material resources that are easily transferred between generations through socialization. Another group of material (e.g. housework) and non-material resources (e.g. relationship with parents) are non-transferable. Young people can enjoy their benefits only while living in the parental home.

Non-transferable resources usually delay home-leaving. Depending on the level of their available resources, parents are able to support their children to different degrees, and parents with different values and norms may encourage or discourage certain decisions of their children (De Jong Gierveld et al. 1991). Most of the intergenerational financial transfers go from the older to the younger family members and they play an important role in financing larger expenses during the periods of studying, home-leaving or family formation (Medgyesi 2003).

The number of children born to a family influences how much of the limited amount of parental resources, time and attention each child receives. The more siblings live together in one household, the less

human and cultural capital parents can invest in one child (Becker 1981).

Previous research found that young people who did not grow up with both biological parents leave the parental home earlier than their peers who were raised by both the mother and the father. Early home-leaving is especially common if a stepparent was also present in the family (Buck – Scott 1993; Goldscheider – Goldscheider 1998; Johnson – Benson 2012; Mencarini et al. 2012).

## ***1.2. Empirical Background***

Previous empirical research results indicate that pre-transition Hungary was characterized by relatively early home-leaving. Trends of postponement and heterogenization started among people born after 1970, and more and more people do not leave the parental home until the end of their young adult years (Székely 2002; Bognár 2007; Murinkó 2009). Women leave earlier and more women leave than men, while postponement is stronger among females.

In the majority of cases home-leaving takes place after finishing education and starting the first job. When the first child arrives, young people usually (and to a growing degree) already live independently from their parents.

The relationship between home-leaving and partnership formation is strong but gradually weakening. From among the life course events that usually take place during young adulthood, first marriage or the

start of the first cohabiting union are the ones that the most often coincide with leaving the parental home. However, it is not uncommon that first partnership precedes first home-leaving. During the last two decades the rate of those who started a cohabiting union only some time after having left the parental nest has gradually increased, while the rate of people cohabiting in the parental household is still considerable (Murinkó 2009, 2010). Since this situation may result in conflicts, young people probably choose this living arrangement because of necessity (Kamarás et al. 2005; Spéder 2005).

### ***1.3. Aims of the Study***

The study aims to understand when and with whom young people in Hungary have left the parental home in the past decades, and how their home-leaving behaviour differ by the composition and resources of their family of origin. We pay special attention to the detailed description of the examined life course event, i.e. leaving the parental home for the first time. Gender differences are emphasized throughout the whole analysis. We also look at changes in home-leaving behaviour, its relationship with partnership events and the role of the parental background.

The following research questions and hypotheses have been formulated.

*Question 1:*

During the past decades, how has the timing of home-leaving changed in Hungary if we differentiate between people who leave the parental home with and without a partner?

*Hypothesis 1:*

People who leave the parental home with a partner tend to increasingly postpone this event. The rate of young people who leave alone increases, while the timing of leaving without a partner shows no change.

*Question 2:*

How do parental resources – the level of education – influence the timing of nest-leaving with or without a partner? In other words, who do stay in the parental home longer: the ones with less or more resources?

*Hypothesis 2:*

Having highly educated parents delays home-leaving with a partner. After a certain age, educated parents encourage their adult children to establish an independent household (either with or without a partner).

*Question 3:*

How does the structure of the childhood family influence the timing of leaving the parental home with or without a partner? When do young women and men who were raised in two-parent, one-parent or

step-parent families leave? Is the timing affected by the number of siblings that the person grew up with?

*Hypotheses 3:*

- Living in a one-parent family, having a step-parent during childhood or growing up with many siblings increase the risk of early home-leaving (except in one-child lone-parent families)
- Women from step-parent families are more likely to leave the parental home earlier, while men with one-parent family background are more likely to do so.

## 2. Methodology

Data from the third wave of the follow-up panel survey called *Turning Points of the Life Course* was used during the analysis. The survey was conducted by the Demographic Research Institute of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office between the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009. The survey is part of the international *Generations and Gender Survey* (Vikat et al. 2007), following its methodological recommendations, its topics and questionnaire. The survey includes retrospective (monthly) information on the timing of several life course events. The three waves make it possible to construct full fertility, partnership, employment and education histories for each respondent.

The retrospective question about the date of leaving the parental home was as follows: “When did you leave the ‘parental home’?” A separate question was asked from people who lived with at least one biological parent at the time of the interview about whether they had ever left the parental home and, if yes, when.

The subsample that we used for the present analysis includes all respondents who participated in the third wave of the *Turning Points of the Life Course* survey (2008-2009) or took part in the supplementary survey that targeted the young adult children of the respondents. The descriptive analyses look at the life course of people born between 1930 and 1988 (n = 9607), and the regression analyses consider the

life events that happened after 1979 to people born between 1944 and 1988 (n = 6141).

The risk population consists of those respondents who lived with at least one biological parent when they turned 16, had never lived with a partner or had not been married earlier. We follow the life course of these women and men between the ages 16 and 35. An observation is censored if the respondent had not established an independent household by the age of 35 or by the time of the interview.

The empirical analysis consists of three parts. In the first, descriptive section we look at the timing of leaving the parental home, together with differences by gender and historical period. Then the relationship between home-leaving and other important life course events is analyzed, with special attention devoted to the relationship between nest-leaving and first partnership. In the second half of the analysis we differentiate between two competing risks: a) home-leaving that is related to establishing a cohabiting union (the two events take place at around the same time) and b) leaving the parental home independently from partnership events. Lastly we analyze the behaviour of a select group of people who started their first cohabiting partnership or got married while still living in the parental home.

The Kaplan-Meier estimation of the survival function was used to study the timing of leaving the parental home. The method takes censored cases into account as well. Cumulative incidence curves helped to identify the ratio of women and men who have moved

away with or without a partner by certain ages and the age-specific risks of home-leaving. Cumulative incidence curves are based on cause-specific risks and they estimate the marginal probability of the competing risks separately (Kleinbaum – Klein 2012).

In the next step event history regression analyses were performed using maximum likelihood estimation. The dependent variables were cause-specific risks (Blossfeld – Rohwer 2002). Separate models were fitted for the two competing risks – leaving with a partner and leaving alone – and for women and men. We assumed that males and females differ not only in their home-leaving behaviour but also different mechanisms are at work.

### 3. Main Results

#### *3.1. On the Timing of Home-Leaving*

Men establish an independent household on average 3 years later and they also start the first cohabiting union at a higher age than women. In the past three decades the home-leaving behaviour of the two sexes has converged. Postponement has been stronger among women; especially their propensity to leave at a relatively young age has decreased. After the transformations of 1989-1990, the expansion of tertiary education, changing partnership behaviour, and the difficulties of entering the labour and the housing markets have contributed to the postponement of leaving the parental home, and more and more young people still live with their parents at the age of 35.

Most leave the parental home alone at the beginning of their twenties, probably because of education or employment reasons. At higher ages home-leaving without a partner is very rare. On the contrary, the intensity of leaving the parental home with a partner decreases only at the end of one's twenties. The earlier home-leaving of women is primarily due to the fact that a greater share of women moves in together with their partner and they do it at a younger age than men. The timing and ratio of leaving alone shows no significant gender differences.

### ***3.2. Home-Leaving and the First Partnership***

Similarly to the developed Western societies, Hungary is also characterized by the gradual detachment of two important life course events of young adulthood, namely leaving the parental home and establishing a cohabiting union for the first time. A growing proportion of the society start living with a partner only after establishing an independent household, and they live with neither the parents nor a partner for a shorter or longer period during their lives. However, financial and housing constraints prevent this phenomenon from becoming universal. Moreover, the practice still exists that the young couple starts living together in the household of the parents of the man or the woman and they start living independently only some time later. As a consequence, the relationship between home-leaving and partnership formation is weakening, but moving in with a partner or spouse is still the dominant route out of the parental home.

More and more women leave the parental home alone due to their increased participation in higher education, however, women start to cohabit and marry at a younger age than men. Consequently, more men leave the parental nest regardless of their partnership events than women do.

Women who leave with a partner move out much earlier than men and other women. The timing of leaving the parental home alone does not show significant gender differences.

### ***3.3. Changes in the Timing of the Competing Risks of Leaving the Parental Home (Research Question 1)***

The results have proved our hypothesis that the event of leaving the parental home with a partner is more and more delayed. The same postponement cannot be identified among people who left the parental home without a partner. The rate of leaving alone has increased among all home-leaving, and the proportion of people who leave alone above the age of 25 has somewhat increased.

### ***3.4. The Effect of Parental Education (Research Question 2)***

Our results have verified the hypothesis that having highly educated parents delays leaving the parental home with a partner, and encourages the adult child to move away after he or she reaches a certain age (usually the second half of the twenties). This effect operates both directly and indirectly, through the own educational attainment of the child and the timing of other life course events.

It seems that parents with general secondary or tertiary education use their material and immaterial resources to mitigate the risks of leaving too early, to encourage mobility at the age of 18-20 that is related to schooling or work, and to support their adult children to move away after they turn 25 either with a partner or alone.

### ***3.5. The Role of Childhood Family Structure (Research Question 3)***

The experience of living in a non-traditional (one-parent or step-parent) family during childhood has proved to have an effect on later home-leaving behaviour, though the effects are weaker than expected.

Having several siblings usually encourages home-leaving, especially among women, while only children stay in the parental nest longer. The more siblings young people have grown up with, the less possibilities they may have to develop an independent life within the parental household. Less time, space, attention and parental resource is devoted to a child with several brothers and sisters, thus they may want to try living independently as soon as possible. Doing so with a partner is the easiest option.

Non-traditional family living arrangements affect boys and girls differently. Living with a step-parent affects women the most, while living with a single parent has more consequences for men. Women leave earlier if there were a step-parent (usually a step-father) in the family during her childhood years. Women are usually more sensitive to changes, tensions and conflicts in the family, they live under stricter control in the parental home and they have to do more housework than their brothers.

Having grown up with no brothers or sisters in a single-parent family (usually with the mother) delays the home-leaving of men, while men with siblings from a single-parent childhood family background leave earlier. The situation that a son with no siblings stays with the mother for a relatively long period of time may be beneficial for both of them. The young man may provide help, support and company for the mother, while she does the housework and takes care of her son. More analysis is needed to see whether these young men are single or they live with their partners in the mother's household.

### ***3.6. Starting a Cohabiting Union in the Parental Household***

About every third woman and man aged between 16 and 35 started a cohabiting union or got married before having left the parental home. This ratio is gradually decreasing. People who have started a partnership in the parental home are the most likely to move out and establish their own household during the first year of the relationship.

More favourable social position does not prevent young people from starting to cohabit in the parental home; however, it does help the couple to move away.

## 4. On the Possible Utilization of Results

The results of the present study can be utilized for both motivating further scientific research and pinpointing some problematic areas for social policy intervention.

Regarding **further scientific research**, the study has left several questions open that large-scale quantitative data are not able to answer. Qualitative analyses – e.g. interviews with young adults and their parents – may help to gain a deeper understanding of the process of leaving the parental home. Several research questions could be examined. What does nest-leaving mean for the young adults and their parents? What factors do they consider before making the decision? Are they successful in realizing their previous intentions about the timing and circumstances of home-leaving? How do family relationships change after adult children leave the parental household? Who are those people who stay in the parental home and why? How can the living situation of co-resident parents and adult children be described?

The panel nature of the *Turning Points of the Life Course* survey also offers a possible point of departure for future research. For example, one can examine who did and who did not leave the parental home between certain waves or whether the intention to move was later realized. A wider range of explanatory variables can be used in this case than in the case of a retrospective event history analysis. For

instance we could measure the income, wealth, housing situation and health status of young adults and their parents. It would be possible to define and analyse such transitory situations when the young person has only partly moved out of the parental home.

For the readers who are interested in **social policy** issues, the main message of the study is that childhood family circumstances have long-lasting effects. What happened during childhood has repercussion in young adulthood and beyond. Early home-leaving may contribute to the intergenerational reproduction of social inequalities.

Children that grew up in families other than the “classical” model of two biological parents with two kids receive less attention, have worse access to parental resources and there are more conflicts in the family. Young people with non-traditional family background and with low-educated parents are more likely to leave the parental home at a young age.

Young home-leavers would benefit from housing support and family care services. They could decrease the risk of dropping out of school without a qualification and being unable to find stable employment.

People in their thirties who still live with their parents – and maybe also with their partner or spouse – represent the other side of the coin. If this situation results from external constraints and becomes permanent, some kind of aid would be needed to assure that young adults – regardless of their partnership status – have access to social housing, renting or buying.

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