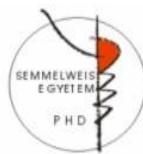# THE CORRELATION OF GENDER ROLE STRESS AND HEALTH STATUS AMONG HUNGARIAN MEN

Ph.D. Thesis

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Introduction

I started working on the present topic at the turn of the millennium. It was at this time when the examination of the quality of life of the Hungarian population became a focal point of the social sciences. The worsening health status and mortality patterns of middle aged Hungarian men (40-69 years old) received special attention. Another research focus appearing at that time was the so called non-traditional health risk factors such as the role of stress. My research uses data from the last two (2006, 2013) Hungarostudy (HS) studies. My thesis deals with gender role changes and the effect stress from gender role expectations has on health status and health behaviour. I will present the situation using Hungarian data comparing and contrasting it with results presented by studies from abroad.

Aims and hypotheses

The main aims of the thesis are as follows:

1. The Hungarian adaptation of the Masculine Gender Role Stress (MGRS) questionnaire, the international instrument used to measure male gender role stress, and the presentation of the shortening process.
2. Analysing the correlation of male gender role stress and socio-demographic as well as socio-economic variables (age, family status, educational background, economic activity).
3. Analysing the correlation of male gender role stress and attitudes regarding marriage and having children.
4. Analysing the correlation of male gender role stress and marital/ relationship stress.
5. Analysing the correlation of the characteristics of male gender role stress and health status (SRH, well-being, disease intrusion) and risk behaviours (alcohol use, smoking)
6. Analysing the correlation of BMI and male gender role stress.

Hypotheses

H1. The level of male gender role stress varies along the dimensions of socio-demographic and socio-economic variables:

   a) gender role stress diminishes with age
   b) gender role stress among men living in a relationship is considerably lower than among men living alone.
   c) the gradual increase of educational level is negatively associated with gender role stress.
   d) gender role stress among the economically inactive is significantly higher than among economically active men.

H2. Gender role stress is associated with the quality of the marital/ partnership relationship. The stress level is influenced by the marital and child raising orientation of the individual.

H3. The traditional and modernising factors of the gender role scale are well separated.

   a) The modernisation of gender role expectations increases gender role stress among men as new stressors appear among old ones.
   b) Modernisation effects in a different way men of different ethnic groups, age, family status and educational background.

H4. High stress load due to gender expectations

   a) negatively influences health status and
   b) increases the likelihood of the occurrence of risk behaviours (smoking, excessive alcohol consumption.)

H5. The level of gender role stress is associated with BMI, that is, the gender role stress of obese and overweight men is likely to be higher.

Methods

The Databases

During my work, I primarily relied on the Hungarostudy (HS) population level health status studies. The Hungarostudy researches have reported 5 times (1988, 1995, 2002, 2006, 2013) on the health status of the Hungarian population and its changes. In these researches the samples are representative of the over 18 Hungarian population for age, gender and settlement type. I used the 2006 and 2013 databases for my work.

Research instruments

I used the following research instruments for my studies:

- Socio-demographic and anthropomorphic characteristics
- Self Rated Health, SRH
- Short form 5 item WHO Well- Being Index (WBI-5)
- Index of Illness Intrusion
- Risk Behaviours
  - Smoking
- Alcohol consumption Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT))
- Masculine Gender Role Stress (MGRS) scale
- Marital Stress Scale (HSS)
- Attitudes and opinions having to do with Marriage and having children

Statistical processes
Various versions of the   SPSS PC. statistical programme packages (SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois, USA) were used for the statistical analysis. The categorical variables were compared using the chi-square test and the Fischer test. The Student's t test was used to compare the continuous normal distribution variables and variance analysis (ANOVA) was used for the relationship of categorical variables. Explorative factor analysis was used for identifying the latent variables and confirmative factor analysis for strengthening

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them. Pearson correlation was used for the bivariate analysis and linear and binary logistic regression model for the multivariate analysis. We identified the independent variables effecting the dependent variables with backward stepwise logistic regression here. I used the P value of the Wald test to describe the significance of the regression coefficient of the given variables. The variables with p<0.10 were kept in the final model. We used the traditional p <0.05 value for the significance level. Missing values were excluded from the analysis in every case.

Results

The shortening process and Hungarian adaptation of the MGRS questionnaire.

The MGRS questionnaire was translated into Hungarian with the approval of the authors and in accordance with the official international procedures. The Hungarian version was first used in a national representative research. The original 5 factor structure of the questionnaire was used during analysis. The 40 item MGRS and the Cronbach-alpha value demonstrating the internal consistency of the subscales were in the optimal range, so the scale and the separate subscales can be said to be consistent. The significant variations found among the subscales demonstrate that the subscales are good at isolating various stressors. The questions are interesting and relevant for Hungarian men, too. Based on the results we can say that the questionnaire can be used and adapted with the Hungarian sample.

In the shortening process, we chose the residual correlation descriptive of the two highest items (0.580–0.838) per subscale as well as two items based on face validation. Hence, the original questionnaire was reduced to 12 items. Cronbach's alpha of the 40-item scale used on the Hungarian sample was 0.92, while the Cronbach's alpha of the 12-item short form was 0.80. The correlation value between the short and long form was 0.94. The correlation of the original subscales and the sums of the items chosen from them are as follows: physical weakness(r=0,79), emotional display deficit (r=0,79), subservience to women (r=0,88), sense of intellectual inferiority (r=0,83), performance failure (r=0,90). In the

shortened form the content of the subscales were strengthened, we could form independent indicators from the items and it is now possible to use the instrument for epidemiological research, too.

Socio-demographical characteristics of male gender role stress, HS 2006

We first examined the MGRS characteristics using the HS 2006 database. The average scores of the subsamples showed that it is anxiety from sense of performance failure and physical weakness that cause the most stress.

We also examined the possible association between the socio-demographic background variables (age, education, relationship status, economic activity, and ethnicity) and gender role stress.

According to our results, stress load from gender role expectations significantly diminishes with age. There is a significant difference between men under 65 and men over 65 in anxiety level from subservience to women, sense of intellectual inferiority and fear of failure. In these areas, gender role stress is significantly lower among older men than among younger ones. Stress related to physical weakness also diminishes with age. The burden of emotional display deficit is felt less by younger men than older ones. Being under or over 35 is the division line

The correlation of educational background and gender role stress was demonstrated in three areas: physical weakness, performance failure and emotional expressivity deficit. Stress from anxiety from physical weakness is more characteristic of educated men. The division line in case of performance failure is between primary education (8 years) and men educated above this level. In general, we can say that the higher the educational background of a man is, the higher stress load from performance failure can be expected. This can't be sad in case of emotional display deficit, because here the relationship is inverse. The higher the qualification, the lower this type of stress load will be. For relationship status and its association with gender role stress, we looked at those living alone, in a relationship or in marriage. The values from men from the different groups differ from each with regards to performance failure

and subservience to women. Anxiety from subservience to women among men living alone or in a relationship is significantly higher than among married men. Anxiety from performance failure is significantly higher among men living in a relationship or marriage than among single men.

Examining the correlation between the various categories of economic activity (working, unemployed, inactive), and gender role stress, we can conclude that on all MGRS subscales unemployed men have the highest stress scores. They differ statistically significantly from the values of the other two groups.

Lastly, we examined the association of gender role stress and ethnicity by comparing the parameters of those who proclaim themselves to be Roma with does who do not. The only area between the two groups where there was a significant difference was performance failure. Men who proclaim themselves to be Roma have significantly higher stress load from performance failure than men who do not.

The correlation of male gender role stress with certain characteristics of health status and risk behaviour, HS 2006

Four models were established during the analysis to see whether or not there is a correlation between elements of gender role stress and general health status and risk behaviours. The effects of given stress factors were corrugated with the effect of the most important social and demographic factors (age, education, economic activity, family status, ethnicity). Results show a positive correlation between regular alcohol consumption and stress from performance failure and emotional expressivity deficit and an inverse relationship with feeling submissive to women and physical weakness.

We are more likely to find smokers among those men who are disturbed by working with smarter, more ambitious and successful colleagues than among those who suffer if they can't express themselves emotionally or comfort a crying person.

Men who are disturbed by not being at their sexual or physical peak or that their environment finds them weak or even feminine evaluate

their emotional well-being negatively. Men who feel disturbed by subservience to women by, for example, having a woman boss, evaluate the physical components of their health status more negatively.

Characteristics of male gender role stress along socio-demographic variables, HS 2006

The initial assumption of our examination was that the *traditional* and *modernising* gender role expectations will manifest themselves along the items of the short form MGRS. Expectations regarding sexual performance, physical strength, bread winner function and expectations regarding the changed social relationship of the genders are thought to be modern. Our assumptions about the two dimensions was supported by confirmative factor analysis. The 12 items of the questionnaire manifested two well isolated factors which explained 48% of the total variance. The Cronbach-alpha value estimating the internal consistence of the two scales was in the optimal 0,60-0,95 range. The average value of the 'traditional' scale was twice that of the average of the 'modernising' scale which means that among adult Hungarian males, stress from problems having to do with sexual performance, supporting a family, and appearance cause a significantly bigger stress load than the level of stress from the changing social relationship of the genders.

We went on to examine the mode and extent stress from traditional and modern role expectations effects men of different age, family status and educational background.

Stress load from traditional role expectations significantly diminishes with age. Tension from dominance of women and situations expecting emotional display and empathy is most characteristic of middle aged men. The level of their stress load significantly differs from men younger and older than them.

In the case of educational background, we registered opposite movements in the two dimensions. In both cases the stress values of men with lower education differ from the other. Traditional role expectations cause them less stress while modern expectations cause more.

Three groups were denoted for economic activity: those working, those out of work and the inactive. As for traditional role stress, the inactive men differed to a great extent from active aged men. Significantly higher average values were characteristic of working and unemployed men. Their average values on the scale were much higher than for the other two groups.

The indicator of family status was derived from variables denoting formal (marriage) and informal (living together in civil partnership) partnerships. Respondents were grouped in the categories of living alone, living in a relationship and living in marriage. Traditional role stress was the same level in all three groups. At the same time, dominance of women and emotional expressivity (a factor describing modernising) caused the least stress for men living in marriage. It had a significantly lower average value than for men living alone or in a relationship.

Examination of the correlation between male gender role models, health status and risk behaviour, HS 2006

We examined the possibility of correlation between gender role stress and health status as well as certain risk behaviours. Subjective, self-rated general indicator was used to describe health status as well as the WHO well-being index. For risk behaviour, we used number of cigarettes smoked per day and frequency of alcohol consumption.

From the factors describing the two dimensions of male gender role stress only the values of the scale of the traditional one shows association with health status and emotional well-being and level of smoking. The level of tension arising from changes in the social relationship of gender roles (modernization) shows no relationship with any of the variables examined.

Examination of the association between male gender role stress and marital/ relationship stress, HS 2006

We first examined the association of gender role stress and marital/ relationship stress on the sample of HS 2006. What we wanted to

know is whether there is a correlation between the type and quality of the relationship and gender role stress. The respondents reported relatively low level of marital/ civil partnership stress which means their relationships are good. At the same time a much higher proportion of those living in civil partnership can be described as having high marital/ relationship stress than married men. (15% vs. 10%). Those living together unmarried report encountering more serious problems and having issues they can't discuss with their partner. More of those living in marriage feel they usually solve their problems together, that their spouse is the person closest to them and spend a bigger proportion of their free time together.

We examined gender role stress by partnership status, too. Men living together unmarried report more stress in situations where women make more money or are more successful. We also looked at the association between marital/ civil partnership stress and gender role stress. We only found a statistically significant relationship between the MGRS subscale of "sense of intellectual inferiority" and marital/ civil partnership stress. This seems to suggest that if a man has emotional problems with a woman being smarter, more ambitious and successful and hence feels intellectually disadvantaged, this will be a source of stress in the marriage or civil relationship, too.

Based on our study, we may say that for men in relationships, marriage and financial wellbeing will lower the level of marital/ civil relationship stress, while stress from "sense of intellectual inferiority" will increase it. Other explanatory variables in the analysis like duration of marriage, age, educational background, number of children and stressors related to gender roles (the subscales of MGRS) manifest no significant correlations.

Gender role expectation related stress load of young men, HS 2013

The HS 2013 made it possible for us to study the association of gender role expectation stress with attitudes to marriage, starting a family, having children among young men (18-35 years).

Analysing the average scores of the subscales of MGRS we can say that it is physical weakness and performance failure and fear from them that cause the highest stress among young men in this sample.

There is no significant difference in the level of gender role related stress between men in relationships and men not in relationships.

Anxiety from performance failure effects men living with their partners more than it does men not living with their partner (p=0,05). In the case of the latter, we found no difference between those planning to move in together and those who had no such plans. Men who do not live in marriage and are not planning to do so have significantly lower stress values from fear of performance failure (p=0,01) than of married men or men planning to get married.

Looking at attitudes and ideas regarding marriage, we can see that those who think marriage is important (as it gives more security in the relationship) have higher overall gender role stress (p=0,05), and have higher fear of subservience to women (p=0,03), than do men who do not mention this.

Our results show that the more respondents agree with the statement that marriage is a thing of the past, the higher the emotional expressivity deficit is, that is, the level of stress associated with anxiety from emotional display deficit (p=0,02) and intellectual inferiority (p=0,05). The more they agree with the statement that it is better to get divorced if a marriage becomes unhappy even if there are kids, the higher their stress level is from fear of physical weakness and (p=0,00) and performance failure (p=0,02). The more they agree with the statement that marriage means security, the higher their overall stress level is (p=0,03).

The correlation of young men's' stress load from gender role expectations with notions about having children, HS 2013

We went on to compare the level of men's' gender role expectation stress with their notions and plans of having children. Men with kids (22,5%) had significantly higher levels of stress stemming from fear of performance failure (p=0,02).

74% of childless men mentioned having goals they wanted to realise before having children. For those people who mention that getting a flat before having children is an aim to be achieved (N= 93) level of stress on the emotional expressivity subscale is significantly higher (p=0,04) than for those who do not mention this goal (N=33). For those people who mention wanting to get international experience before having children as a goal, stress from the fear of physical weakness (p=0,01) and from performance failure (p=0,01) is significantly lower than among those who do not mention this aim.

The examination of the correlation of BMI and gender role stress among young males, HS 2013

The 12 item MGRS scale and its items dealing with sexuality and sexual performance were examined for the proportion of people who belong to the high stress range according to BMI categories. People who rated their stress level at 5 or 6 on the Likert scale were considered to belong to high stress range. In the case of the short form MGRS scale, respondents with average scores of 5 or more were considered to be in the high stress range.

According to our results gender role stress (MGRS scale) and high sexuality related stress are correlated with overweight/ obesity. The correlation with BMI categories is significant with sexual arousal (p=0.000) and sexual performance (p=0.027) There is a tendency for correlation in the case of high stress level related to establishing sexual relationships (p=0.061) and appearing feminine (p=0.073). All in all, overweight/ obese men reported almost one and a half times more (1.3) gender role stress than people with normal bodyweight.

Only sexual arousal showed significant correlation with partnership status. In this case high stress level was significantly more frequent among those living with a partner (71.5% vs. 59.8%).

We went on to use logistic regression analysis to see what kind of correlation there is between overweight/ obesity and gender role stress as well as sexuality related stress if it is corrugated with the

type of relationship status. In the case of the models we saw that overweight/ obese young men were much more likely to report high level gender role stress, and within this, stress related to sexual arousal and sexual performance, than men with normal BMI. (OR=1.67).

Comparative examination of gender role stress values of young men (18-35 years) based on the HS 2006 and HS 2013 researches

The MGRS was administered in the HS 2013 research for young men hence its results could only be compared with the research done seven years ago in this age group.

Our results show that the average value of the total MGRS hasn't changed in consecutive generations while we measured statistically significant changes in half of the items making up the scale. We analysed the changes by subscales and through the traditional and modernising factors we created. Compared to the 2006 research, there were significant changes in all the subscales except for the emotional expressivity deficit and the performance failure subscales. The average score value of the physical weakness related gender role stress became smaller while stress from subservience to women and from sense intellectual inferiority went up.

In the two factor version, the average value of stress went down for the traditional factor and that of modernisation went up among young people.

Conclusions

Our research results demonstrate the correlation of stress from gender role expectations with finding a partner, willingness to marry, and strategies about having children. The results show that family commitments are a source of anxiety for the generation of young men, Anxiety, which in many cases is a delaying or deterrent force in partnership and marital commitment as well as in deciding to have children, is not only a demographic response to changing social and economic challenges. This anxiety is also rooted in gender role expectations present in lay thinking, or, to be more precise, from discrepancies between these role expectations and role performance.

The modernisation of male gender roles, which in our research material is defined at the level of variations from the traditional male-female relationship, hardly causes any tension for men. This of course could mean that Hungarian men have no problems adjusting to situations in which a woman is more successful or earns more. Nevertheless, being familiar with present Hungarian social conditions, the researcher takes the stance that the low stress level is due to the fact that the situation described above is less frequent, although the results of the comparative analysis point to the moderate increase of these social situations as stress due to modernising role expectations is increasing among young men. The traditional factor apparent in male gender expectations involving considerable tension and role stress does not only influence demographic conditions, but also effects health behaviour and health status.

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