Factors Influencing Child Number Preferences of Adolescents and Young Adults Living in Large Families

PhD thesis

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1. INTRODUCTION

Decision makers have to face growing challenges in terms of the demographical changes of modern societies. In the last couple of decades fertility rate has been considerably low in Hungary, since the seventies it has been even under the reproduction level. The number of population not only declines, but parallely it becomes older, thus the ratio between active and inactive citizens is shifting sharply. Social science investigations support to embrace and acquire several theories and particular aspects of the processes as well as there are many accurate prognoses existing regarding expected fertility. Nevertheless, it is considerably difficult to determine the special characteristics of the micro communities- families- affecting the decisions regarding childbearing. Additionally, personal characteristics and values - differing from the majority of the population- could also have significant impact on the number of planned children.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the childbearing attitudes and desires of young adults and adolescents growing up in families where the number of raised children exceeds the national average.

This dissertation therefore investigates a high fertility rate subgroup- members of the Association of Hungarian Large Families (NOE) - in the low fertility Hungarian society. This manuscript outlines those factors having significant impact on the childbearing preferences of young adults living in the above mentioned type of family.

During our research personal, family characteristics and societal effects were distinguished. Factors affecting the desire to maintain large family lifestyle had been taken into consideration with a high priority.

To understand decisions and processes regarding childbearing attitudes - in line with the majority of social phenomenon - both macro and micro level factors should be taken into consideration. Macro level appoints social level entities, while micro level regards to personal decisions, free will and interactions with others.

2. AIMS

This thesis focuses on demographically important large families that are however being neglected in current investigations. In the last couple of decades national and international surveys explored the most prominent processes causing the permanently low level of European fertility rate. The theoretical background of this dissertation was based on the Coleman- diagram offering accurate knowledge about real fertility.

On the other hand the number of research investigating micro level and its results/outcomes (values, attitudes, beliefs) is currently limited. Even less research is existing collecting and summarizing the data from individuals having the most significant impact on young adolescents- parents and siblings.

The goal of this manuscript was to present data in line with the above mentioned: Among NOE member-families a representative research was carried out with the aim to collect answers from several family members to get more accurate picture about the factors influencing child bearing attitudes among young adolescents.

The results were analysed in line with the TDIB Model: describing the traits desires, intentions, and behaviour affecting fertility desires.

Because of the special characteristics of the sample (age and life situation of the respondents) it was aimed to investigate their values and attitudes concerning child preferences rather than drawing conclusions regarding their real fertility.

3. METHODS

The sample was drawn from the list of member families. The size of the sample (in line with the financial resources) was set to be 600 families. The most significant aspect was the settlement type of the respondents: 25 % of the respondents are living in the Capitol, 25% in big cities while 50% of the surveyed are living in smaller cities and settlements.

Beside the main 600 surveys (one of the parents answered the questions) in 486 cases both of the parents fulfilled the questionnaire. Additionally, in 362 cases young adults or teenagers over the age of 15 also answered the questions.

In the following those who fulfilled the child questionnaire and are living in the same household as their parents will be indicated as child. It is important to highlight that according to their age they should be indeed considered as young adults or adolescents. From the analyses those young adults were excluded that are living together with their parents but are over the age of 30. Thus, from the 362 families 325 remained in the sample with a total of 570 child respondents. From the 325 families in case of 159 families one child fulfilled the questionnaire in 84 cases two while in 81 cases three children answered the questions. Regarding the parents mothers could be considered as more active respondents- 589 women answered the questionnaires, while 497 male respondents were reached.

The quantitative dataset was analysed by using IBM SPSS 22.00 software system. Beside the descriptive statistics one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed. To confirm the differences between the groups regarding the dependent variables in case of equal variances LSD post hoc tests while in case of differing variances Tamhane- T2-t test was also performed. In case of interval and rate scales Pearson correlation and Kendall Tau b- was performed. To consider the test as significant p values should have been under 0,05 ($p<0,05$*; $p<0,01$**; $p<0,001$***). The reliability check of the validity scales was determined by the values of Crombach α.

As more than one family member provided information the respondents were assigned into dyads (Kenny et al., 2006). From the 3 dyadic models distinguished by Kenny and Winquist (2001) the standard two sided dyad design was performed. In order to reveal the relationship between type similarities of the families and the effect of the family of origin on family values random dyads were designed and data was analysed similarly to sibling dyads. In case of the pseudo dyads according to the suggestions of Little and Rubin the values were counted 5 times from which arithmetic average was counted (Little and Rubin 1987).

When observing the factors influencing the dependent variable it was problematic that the 570 children live in only 325 different households all together. If all of the respondents had been treated separately the independency of the observations would have been endangered. In order to avoid bias we only selected into the sample one respondent per family.

Through multiple variable analyses to determine the family types K-means cluster analysis was performed. Additionally, logistic regression was also carried out in order to determine the factors influencing the large family lifestyle.

4. RESULTS

The characteristics of the sample

76,6% of the families involved in the research could be considered as intact family, and in the majority (86,5%) two parents are living together. The average age of the fathers is 46,48 year (SD=9,00) the mothers average age is 44,61 year (SD=9,18), while the average age of the children is 19,99 year (SD=3,71). The average size of the households is 5,43 person (SD=1,30). Amongst the parents in accordance with the national average married pairs are over represented. According to the level of education homogeneity was observed: in 67% parents are educated equally as well as in the majority siblings have similar or equal qualification level. In comparison with the national representative data the education level of respondents is higher than the national average.

-From the aspect of religious views, as well as in case of the ratio of visiting churches families in the sample could be considered as highly religious. However, it is important to mention that children are less religious than their parents.

-When harmonizing family life and business - business damages family life engagement more often than vice versa: 14% of the fathers, while 12 % of the mothers face everyday family-business conflicts.

-Happiness and satisfaction are strongly correlated; fathers are more happy and satisfied than mothers, however the difference is not remarkable. On a scale ranging between: 1-10 -fathers satisfaction was 7,58 while the mean score of mothers satisfaction was 7,39. The scores of happiness reached higher values in both cases: fathers M=7,93; mothers M=7,73. In the families the most happiest and the most satisfied members are children (mean scores of happiness=7,78 mean scores of satisfaction= 7,96).

The composition of the families

- Attitudes regarding religiousness, religious worship and marriage

- Mental hygienic characteristics

- Variables regarding the statues of the family

- Financial background of the families

- The three determined family clusters:

- High status, conservative (22%; N=45)

- Secular middle-class (58%-a; N=117)

- Low income, unsatisfied (20%; N=41)

The three clusters in case of preferred child number differ significantly. Families in the high income cluster plan the highest number of offspring (M=2,81; SD=0,938). The planned child number of the secular middle class families is still above the reproductivity level (M=2,31; SD=0,689), while families in the low income cluster would like to have the fewest children M=1,81-t (SD=1,128). In all the three cases the ideal number of children exceeds the planned number. The biggest difference in the two numbers is in case of the 3. cluster (low income families).

Child number preferences of the respondents

In the sample only 4 respondents stated that they would not like to have children in the future, which is even less than the number of individuals who would like to have at least 5 or more. The tendency of the western European countries - having 2 children - could be observed in this sample too, as two half of the respondents would like to have two children. 11,9% of the surveyed would like to have only one child, while having 3 children is the most desired in the sample (24,7%), 6,1%-would like to have 4 offspring, and 2% would like to have 5 children. In the summary it can be postulated that the average of desired child number amongst adolescents living in large families exceeds the national average (M=2,31, SD=0,938). The means of the desired number of children are summarized in Table 1.

<u>Table 1.</u> The average desired child number amongst adolescents living in large families

	Mean	**SD**	**F**	**95% CI**	
Male	2,29	0,879		2,18	2,39
Female	2,45	1,325	**0,944**	1,98	2,92
Living in Budapest	2,44	1,064		2,21	2,66
Living in town	2,29	0,835	**1,672**	2,15	2,43
Living in village	2,16	0,956		1,93	2,39
Intact family	2,44	1,933		2,32	2,57
Non intact family	1,96	0,862	**16,365*****	1,78	2,15
Two parents family	2,38	0,916		2,27	2,50
One parent family	1,87	0,944	**12,042*****	1,58	2,15

Factors influencing child number preferences

-*The level of parents' education:* significant relationship was found between the level of education of the parents and the desired child number of their children ($p<0,001$). (m=2,80; sd=0,957). Those whose parents do not have higher degree than vocational training would like to have the least children. (M=2,00; SD=0,671). Ordinality can be observed in intermediate categories as well.

-*Financial situation:* Desired child number of young adolescents is significantly correlated with their financial situation ($F=6,791$; $p<0,001$). Those whose financial situation can be considered better desire more children (M=2,62) than those whose financial situation is around the average (M=2,31), nevertheless the former group still desires more children than those who are facing serious financial problems (M=1,92).

-*Family and work:* In those families where les family-business conflict was experienced children desire more offspring, although the difference is not significant.

-*Household:* Those young adolescents plan the most of the offspring whose parents shared equally the household jobs, (M=2,54; SD=0,878) just like in case of sharing the duties around child rearing (M=2,41; SD=0,955).

-*Religion:* Regarding the desired child number the religious entity do not have significant impact, nevertheless those who are religious would like to have the highest number of children M=2,82-(SD=0,925), and according to their attitude the ideal number is even slightly higher, 2,84 (SD=0,947). For those who are religious in their own way, the number of the averages are the following: desired child number: M=2,27 (SD=0,875) ideal child number: M=2,53 (SD=0,880). The least religious adolescents would like to have the least children: planned child number: M=2,16 (SD=0,946) ideal: M= 2,42-t (SD=1,034). Attending religious events also influences the desired and ideal number of offspring. The numbers are the following: regular church going (every week)-planned: M=2,90 (SD=1,015) ideal: M=2,94 (SD=0,942).Those attending religious events more than one in a month: desired: M=2,45 (SD=0,688), Ideal: M= 2,64 (0,674). Attending religious ceremonies occasionally: desired: M= 2,53 (SD=0,937), ideal: M= 2,89-t (SD=1,031). Those who are never visiting religious events- desired: M=2,12 (SD=0,863), ideal: M=2,36 (SD=0,890), (average numbers are close to the reproductivity level)

-*Attitudes concerning marriage:* Those who would like to get married in the future would like to have significantly ($p<0,001$) more children that those who are not planning to wed. Those who would like to get married for sure would like to have around 2, 44 (SD=0,947) children, while those who would like to be rather married would like to have 2,28-(SD=0,836) offspring. On the other hand those who never would like to become married would like to have more children (M=2,17;SD=1,090) than those who might would like to get married (M=1,69;SD=0,604).

-*Mental health characteristics:* Significant correlation was found between the relevant factors from the aspect of mental health and the desired number of children: happiness ($r= 0,230$; $p<0,01$) and satisfaction with life ($r=0,187$; $p<0,001$). Those who are happier as well as more satisfied would like to have more children. Based on the five items of WHO well-being scale, the relationship between the two variables cannot be statistically justified. Both in the case of the Multidimensional Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) ($r=0,145$; $p<0,05$) and the subscale of family support ($r=0,125$; $p<0,05$) only weak

correlation was found. It can be suggested that those who experience higher social support would like to have more children than those who experienced less social support.

Fertility plans of the siblings

In order to investigate the similarities between the desired child numbers of siblings two methods were utilized. On one hand absolute different scores were counted: the desired child number was subtracted from his/her sibling's desired child number.

On the other hand Kendall's correlation was run in order to identify whether there is a correlation between siblings' child preferences. To explore whether the similarities can be explained by the characteristics of the family of origin, or the members of these families can be characterized by a similar set of values, random dyads were created. The results are shown in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. ***The coefficients and significance values of tau-b Kendall correlation between the desired numbers of children of the dyad members (N=248)***

	1st child		**2nd child**		**3rd child**	
	t_b	*sig.*	t_b	*sig.*	t_b	*sig.*
SIBLING DYADS						
1st child	-		**0,381**	**0,000**	**0,275**	**0,014**
2nd child	**0,381**	**0,000**	-		0,195	n.s
3rd child	**0,275**	**0,014**	0,195	n.s	-	
PSEUDO-DYADS						
1st child	-		0,083	n.s	0,010	n.s
2nd child	0,083	n.s	-		-0,059	n.s
3rd child	0,010	n.s	-0,059	n.s	-	

Table 3. ***Distribution of the Sibling- and the Pseudo-dyads based on the absolute difference of the desired number of children of the members (%)***

Dyads	*N*	*Same*	*± 1*	*±2*	*±3 or more*
SIBLING DYADS					
1st-2nd	84	45,4	43,9	9,3	1,4
1st-3rd	82	39,1	53,2	4,6	3,1
2nd-3rd	82	40,6	43,8	14,0	1,6
PSEUDO-DYADS					
1st-2nd	84	36,2	43,9	17,1	2,8
1st-3rd	82	32,8	50,8	12,0	4,4
2nd-3rd	82	25,8	54,6	13,6	6,0

Factors enhancing the probability of intergenerational transmission

One of the most important questions of our research was to investigate the circumstances and personal characteristics influencing child number plans in line with family traditions. In order to answer this question, in cases the factors having significant impact on the preferred child number logistic regression was performed to determine the strongest predictors of sustaining family traditions. Additionally, in order to have appropriate case number in all of the categories low level variable were merged into categories. Result of the $\times^2$ test regarding 242 cases was 55,87 ($p<0,001$), the pseudo R^2 was 0,1795.

Those independent variables that are in correlation with another independent variable were removed from the model. This method was based on the step by step entry and exit of variables. We have reached the final model after several iterations, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. ***The logistic regression model of variables establishing the intergenerational transmission of large family lifestyle***

	OR	***S.E.***	***z***	***95% CI***	
Both parents have low educational level					
low-medium	*2,669*	*1,456*	*1,80*	*0,916*	*7,777*
low-high	*3,227*	*2,434*	*1,55*	*0,735*	*14,156*
medium-medium	*1,766*	*0,914*	*1,10*	*0,640*	*4,875*
medium-high	*2,558*	*1,486*	*1,62*	*0,819*	*7,988*
high-high	*4,861*	*2,600*	*2,96***	*1,704*	*13,867*
Regular church attendance					
Occasional church attendance	*0,328*	*0,132*	*-2,76***	*0,149*	*0,723*
Never visits church	*0,204*	*0,089*	*-3,64****	*0,086*	*0,480*
Better financial situation than average					
Average financial situation	*1,263*	*0,591*	*0,50*	*0,504*	*3,163*
Worse financial situation than ave.	*0,372*	*0,270*	*-1,36*	*0,089*	*1,544*
Prefers marriage	*1,682*	*0,719*	*1,22*	*0,728*	*3,889*
Intact family	*2,220*	*1,063*	*1,67*	*0,869*	*5,675*
Cons.	*0,189*	*0,160*	*-1,97**	*0,036*	*0,993*

5. CONCLUSION

In Europe those families who are raising at least 3 children are belonging to the minority and it cannot be expected that their number will grow sharply in the near future. Nevertheless, large families are always and constantly represented in the society. The

main aim of this manuscript was to investigate whether children growing up in such families bear special characteristics regarding desired child numbers and have different opinion as well from those who were not raised in large families. Based on the theoretical background of this research it was assumed that social processes, family characteristics and personal characteristics have significant impact on the planned child number. In line with the Coleman-diagram in can be postulated that micro level assumptions and the changes of social norms have significant impact on large families too, although adolescents living in large families still would like to have more children, than their fellow peers. Therefore it can be suggested that family characteristics are not having an overwriting impact on the broader environment, however they do have moderator effect on the individuals, and slow down the processes. It would be difficult to compare the real child number of the parents with their children's desired child number because of the special characteristics of the sample: the older generation in the sample could be considered as more homogenous as all of them have more children than the average. If the desired child number of parents and their offspring would be compared at the same age, parents would have wanted more offspring than their children. Additionally, it can be also assumed that young adolescents in the sample in comparison with their control age group are markedly religious but less religious than their parents. Especially the institutional religiousness has been descending. The same can be concluded regarding marriage. Those who were raised in large families prefer marriage; however it only appears as a possibility and is not self-understood as it was for their parents or even for their grandparents.

When researching the micro-level assumptions the special characteristic of the families were analysed. Out of the parents involved in the sample one or both were originating from small families. As the number of families having at least 3 children is considerably constant it can be postulated that the majority of children growing up in large families will not have more than two children.

In our research sample parents are from different size families, and it was not typical that they were looking for partners with similar backgrounds. The status of the grandparents could be considered constant, therefore it can be postulated that the stability of the family of origin is more important than its size regarding fertility decisions.

In societies there are many stereotypes regarding large families: Large families are highly polarized; families with low income and those who can afford it have more children. Family and business are mutually exclusive; you have to choose between them. Our results slightly alter this picture (although because of the special characteristics of our sample conclusions cannot be made concerning all of the Hungarian large families). The members of NOE are not homogeneous concerning social status and income, polarization was not explored, both families with high as well as with low income were represented. According to the results of the cluster analysis the NOE members are mainly middle income families, therefore are less polarized as the general opinion suggests.

According to the other common point of view, bearing children is the alternative of business carrier. In the investigated families the majority of the parents (both of the parents) are having paid jobs. Furthermore in families where parents' education in not at an equal level mothers are usually over-educated. On the basis of the above mentioned conclusion can be made that harmonizing business and family does not necessarily require compromises; having more children does not hamper parents to be successful in the other parts of their life too.

The direct effect of the family origin on the number of desired child number could be further supported by two observations: siblings planning similar number of children, (significantly approved). This similarity was not significantly proved in case of random dyads, therefore it could be interpreted as the result of the family characteristics rather than the homogeneity of the sample. On the other hand in the three identified clusters the difference was not equal regarding the planned and desired child number. Therefore it can be suggested that children living in the most disadvantageous families more often feel that they need to make compromises when having children.

The other theory used in the evaluation section was the TDIB Modell of Miller. This method supports to reveal latent non visible factors too that are in significant correlation with the preferred child number. Based on the answers regarding the desired child number both positive and negative motivation factors were identified. According to the results- in line with Millers theory- the positive motivation factors are more dominant in case when higher child number is preferred, while in cases where the negative factors are more

dominant less child number is desired. Our experiences show that prominent factors could be easily identified, but it is hard to determine the amplitude of their effect.

Based on the results of the research it was also suggested to collect data from individuals living in the same households as the surveyed young adolescents. The results justify that beside objective life circumstances and personal characteristics the values of parents and siblings are having also significant impact on the number of planned children, although this correlation remains hidden in the majority of the cases.

The dilemmas of the results

Upon presenting the results of our research the question always emerged: are the results applicable to draw conclusions that go beyond the NOE membership? It is proposed that one of the main strengths of the dissertation is the innovative type of data collection, therefore the fact that the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample differ from the Hungarian population cannot be interpreted as a problem. The recommendation to weight the data according to the census was dismissed as the desired national level representativeness could not have been reached in this way either (nor would have been representative the data regarding the NOE membership). Therefore the control group was selected from the Hungarian Adolescents 2012 database: in the sample those young people were represented who have at least two siblings and are living together with their parents. There is no doubt that if one of the national level representative samples had been selected the result would not have been representative, however it would worth to observe whether the above mentioned correlations can be revealed in other databases too.

In the Hungarian Youth 2012 sample 1271 cases met the criteria. Their desired child number is M=1,94 (SD=0,837) significantly higher than the overall sample, however a lot lower than the NOE average. Nevertheless it is suggested that investigating whether the factors - having significant impact on the depending variable - differ from each other is more important.

By comparing those independent variables that are represented in both of the samples many similarities were observed. The financial situation of the families were not measured with the same question however it can be concluded that in both of the samples those would like to have more children who have better financial circumstances. The

other indicator of the social status was the education level of the parents: in this case similar correlation was found- those whose parents have higher level of education desire to have more children. Regarding the attitude of the respondents in both cases the more religious respondents as well as those who prefer marriage would like to have more offspring. The type of residence was the only variable where the results indicate difference between the two samples. In case of the NOE sample individuals living in the capitol would like to have more offspring while those in the other sample who are living in Budapest would like to have fewer children than the average. In the other type of settlements no difference was found. Therefore it can be concluded that the correlations observed in line with the desired child preference are not unique, and are similar to the consequences found in other samples. Furthermore it is suggested that the conclusions concerning other factors - could not be investigated in other samples - would also indicate similarities, however it has to be highlighted that the above mentioned speculation can not be empirically justified nor denied.

The adaptability of the results and possible future directions

The demographical processes of the Hungarian society - low level of birth rate, population decline, age structure - has been requiring interventions. Thus many steps were made to encourage citizens to have children, as well as decreasing the opportunity costs of child raising. Many research(es) aimed to scientifically reveal the factors having impact on the fertility decisions, although the majority of these researches were focusing on the macro level- family policy assumptions. In this research several other micro level factors were identified affecting child number preferences. It is hard to influence family affections and the attitudes of the parents and siblings, nevertheless reviling their role in decision making are inevitable when choosing the most appropriate tool of intervention.

This dissertation is highly innovative because of the used method: In quantitative research usually individuals are considered as the research unit, while in this manuscript the answers of families and family members were treated as one unit.

This research is suggested to be a pilot project being worth to expand to representative level (by adopting the necessary corrections). Although in a low fertility society investigating high fertility families is always interesting, we assume that researching families with two children in line with the above mentioned would offer also fruitful and interesting results.

6. LIST OF OWN PUBLICATIONS

Publications related to the thesis

Bálity Cs, Duráczky B. A munka-család konfliktusok gyakoriságának és a társas támogatás észlelésének összefüggései nagycsaládos párok körében. In: Pilinszki A, Szabó T (szerk.) Családi és közösségi konfliktusok. Semmelweis Egyetem Mentálhigiéné Intézet, Budapest 2015a:67-80.

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Bálity Cs, Duráczky B. (2016) Intergenerational transmission of different types of religiosity among family members. RELIG SOC CENTR EAST EUR 9 1:37-51

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Bálity Cs, Duráczky B. A gyermekkori család és a társadalmi környezet hatása a vallásosság intergenerációs átadására.In: Bacskai K.(szerk.) A felekezeti oktatás új negyedszázada: Tanulmányok Pusztai Gabriella tiszteletére. Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen 2017b:179-193.

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