CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERS’ PARTNERSHIP DISSOLUTION AND RE-PARTNERING: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UNION TYPES AND COHORTS

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European Population Conference
Budapest, 25-28 June 2014
Background

- Diffusion of non-marital cohabitation and out-of-wedlock births
- Partnership dissolution and re-partnering

- Important implications for the lives of children involved
- Are children more affected?

Research questions

How does the changing partnership behaviour of parents influence family composition from the point of view of the children?

1. How often do children born in cohabitation and marriage experience the dissolution of their parents’ union? (convergence?)
2. How often do children live in stepfamilies due to the (re)partnering of their mother?
3. Have the experiences of children changed since the 1980s?
Data and methods

- Hungarian Generations and Gender Survey
- Child database (n = 8244) – restructured from mothers’ partnership and birth histories
- The life course of children between ages 0–15
- Life table method (cumulative survival functions)

Analysis:
1. The partnership context of births
2. Dissolution of parents’ union
3. Step-family formation
4. Summary measures
## The partnership context of births

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born to lone mother</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in cohabitation</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in marriage</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distribution of births by the mother’s partnership status
Children’s experience of partnership dissolution

The cumulative percentage of children who experience parental separation, for children born in union
Children’s experience of partnership dissolution by union type

The cumulative percentage of children who experience parental separation by birth context.
Children’s experience of partnership dissolution by union type

The cumulative percentage of children who experience parental separation by birth context.
## Children’s experience of partnership dissolution by union type – detailed

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born in cohabitation</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in marriage</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct marriage</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage after cohabitation</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Percentage of children who experience parental separation by age 15, by detailed birth context
Children’s experience of step-family formation 1 – born to lone mothers

The cumulative percentage of children in step-parent families, for children born to a lone mother.
Children’s experience of step-family formation 2 – re-partnering

The cumulative percentage of children in step-parent families, for children born in union

- 2005–2012

Time since mother's relationship broke up (years)
Ratio of children experiencing living in different family forms

Children’s experience of living in different types of families

1981–1988

2005–2012

Married parents
Cohabiting parents
Single mother
Mother & stepfather

Age of child

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

Married parents
Cohabiting parents
Single mother
Mother & stepfather

100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Conclusions

• Changes in partnership behaviour have crucial impact on children’s experiences of family life
• The ratio of children born in cohabitation has increased from 3% to 35% since the 1980s
• The ratio of children experiencing the dissolution of their parents’ relationship has doubled
• A general decrease in union stability
• Cohabitation and marriage have not diverged nor converged – but diverging destinies of direct marriages and marriages with prior cohabitation
Thank you for your attention!

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