

## Identifying Causes of Separation in a Longitudinal Perspective

### *Extended abstract*

#### **1. The factors of partnership instability**

Partnership dissolution is associated with several demographic, socio-economic and psychological factors. Many studies have identified factors which are associated with an increasing likelihood of divorce, but few studies have looked specifically at separations among cohabiting couples - these may be similar to those for married couples but not necessarily.

Usually the following factors have been identified as increasing the likelihood of divorce: early marriage, premarital cohabitation, premarital birth, having children early in marriage, experience of marital breakdown among parents, having been married previously, experience of living apart, poor economic backgrounds, low educational achievement, inconsistency between couples social classes, access to alternative partners, access to an alternative home (eg parents' home). Furthermore, previous researches have found that the probability of marital disruption is changing during the marriage: it is the lowest in the first year and the highest between the duration of five to ten years and then decreases again. Divorce risk varies also over calendar time which is the result of modifications in divorce legislation as well as changes in the socio-economic and cultural context. Demographic factors were found to be more significant predictors of divorce than socio-economic ones. Only some researches focused on subjective factors of the respondents, but found that these also play significant role: partnership quality (satisfaction), and value orientation ("conservative attitude concerning partnership") had clear significant effect in multivariate models.

There is much less investigation about breaking up cohabitation. We can assume that most of the factors experienced in case of divorce also work among cohabiting partners. However we could also assume, that some factors play different role in case of cohabitation.

In our previous research we found that some values and attitudes towards cohabitation versus marriage and the quality of partnership played significant role in partnership

dissolution (Table 1). For example, people who think to get married when a child is born very important, have much smaller risk of union dissolution than people who think it is not important; satisfaction with partnership has also a significant effect on partnership break-up: people who are not satisfied with their partnership have two times higher risk to dissolve their union than fully satisfied people.

Table 1. How values, attitudes and partnership quality affect on first union dissolution<sup>1</sup>

<b>Covariates</b> (reference categories are in the parentheses)	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Relative risks</b>
Importance of marriage when a child is born (not)	not particularly	1.10
	quite important	1.11
	very important	0.62 ^
Importance of individual goals in marriage (not really important)	important	0.71
	very important	0.54**
Religiosity (yes, he/she follows the teaching of the church)	religious on his/her own way	1.55
	he/she can't say	2.02 ^
	not religious	1.44
Satisfaction with partnership (fully satisfied)	quite satisfied	1.08
	not satisfied	2.01**
Frequency of quarrels (almost never)	rarely	0.93
	often	1.14
Thinking of breaking off the relationship (no)	yes	1.89**
	yes, very seriously	4.51***

\*\*\* p<0.01    \*\* p<0.05    \* p<0.1    ^ p<0.15

## 2. Description of changing partnership instability

Since the mid 90s more people start her/his partnership carrier in cohabitation as in marriage. Of course many of them will be transformed into marriage, and could be seen as “trial marriage” as the popular opinion holds it. One could argue, that differences are only in the type of the institutionalization, but their meaning for the partners are the same. We are interested in the stability vs. instability of partnership, therefore we compare the two type of first partnership according their propensity to stay or to break.

Considering the developments, different developments could be identified<sup>2</sup>. Firstly the fragility of cohabitation as first union clearly increased. Among the most recent establishments, closely one third of cohabitation as first partnership will be dissolved within five years. Secondly, the transition of cohabitation into marriage decreased. Thirdly, the ratio

<sup>1</sup> Földházi, Erzsébet – Spéder, Zsolt (2008): Influences of Values and Partnership Quality on Separation. Unpublished draft. (Presented on EPC Conference in Barcelona, Spain.)

<sup>2</sup> Own calculation, „Turning Points of the Life Course” 1. and 2. waves, HCSO DRI, 2001–2005.

of permanent cohabitation first increased and then leveled off around 27-28 percent of all cohabitation as first partnership.

As long as cohabitation today make up the bigger share of first partnership the dissolubility of the first union, and consequently partnership instability increased.<sup>3</sup> This development highlights the increasing importance of our topic.

### **3. Data and method**

The analysis is based on three waves of the Hungarian GGS survey, named “Turning Points of the Life Course”. Attitudes and partnership quality will be measured at the first and second wave, separation, the dependent event, will be measured in the 7 years time window after the first wave. The first wave was conducted in 2001, the second wave in 2004/2005 and the third wave in 2008/2009.

Our method is event history analysis. The *dependent variable* in our study is separation of union (marriage or cohabitation). The *process time* (the basic time factor) is the time elapsed from the first interview until the separation, measured in months. Observations are *censored* in two situations: at the date of the interview, if there is no event; and at the death of a partner, when the partnership ends due to this reason.

We apply a *piecewise constant event history model* in our analysis, which assumes that hazard rates are constant in each segment of the basic time factor but can vary across them. Results are presented in a form of exponentiated coefficients, which are interpreted as *relative risks*.

#### ***Covariates***

##### *Control variables*

birth cohort, education level, type of settlement, unemployment experience, income, economic activity, intact childhood family

##### *Characteristics of the first union*

type (marriage, cohabitation+marriage, cohabitation), age at the beginning of the first union, duration until the first interview, number of children, age of the youngest child

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### *Explaining variables*

Socio-economic variables: changes in economic activity status (time-varying), partner's economic activity status, inconsistency in economic activity status between the respondent and the his/her partner; inconsistency in education level between the respondent and his/her partner

Partnership quality: satisfaction with partnership, intensity of quarrels, intention to separate, intention to marry

Values, attitudes: gender role values, measure of uncertainty, partnership ideals, subjective assessment of cohabitation vs. marriage, religiousness