

STABILITY AND CHANGE IN THE FAMILY STRUCTURE OF THE ELDERLY

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Motivation

In consequence of **demographic ageing** and the fact that older people have been increasingly likely to live longer and alone during recent decades the living arrangements of elderly is becoming an important topic. The family structure has great influence on living conditions, social networks, health and several other aspects of life, in addition on the social burden of demographic ageing. The previous Hungarian studies use cross-sectional data to describe trends in the distribution of living arrangements among the elderly. Our study deals with the family structures and their changes along the late life using panel data.

Data, methods

In our research we use the four waves of the *Hungarian GGS* as a database. The total duration of the survey was 11 years running from 2001 to 2012. In the four waves 8103 people were interviewed. The study uses the data of people who were *aged 55-69* at the beginning of the data collection (in 2001), so we analyse the *family transitions* of persons who were born between 1932 and 1946. Our study is based on the information of 1908 respondents. The size of the weighted sample is 1588. Five living arrangements were distinguished: **1. living alone, 2. living with spouse only, 3. living with children, 4. living with a spouse and children and 5. other family arrangement.** The household composition comes from the initial survey regarded as baseline living arrangements and changes in household composition was followed. To analyse the transitions we use two and also multidimensional analyses, namely binary logistic regression to model the influence of respondents' characteristics on the likelihood of living arrangement change.

Research questions

- How likely is it that an older person in a particular living arrangement makes a transition to another type of living arrangements?
- What transitions are the most typical among the elderly?
- What demographic and social characteristics influence on becoming a one person household?

Analysis

Transitions out of the baseline living arrangements

Half of the individuals in the age groups analysed here experienced some form of change in their family structure. Women and younger age groups were somewhat more affected; however differences are not too large. Among those who experienced change, there was typically only one change in family structure over the 11 years, and the proportion of people who experienced two or more changes was only 13 per cent in both men and women.

1 Proportion of people who experienced change in their family structure between 2001-2012

Year of birth	Males				Females			
	Number of changes in family arrangement				Number of changes in family arrangement			
	0	1	2	3 or more	0	1	2	3 or more
1932-1936	59	31	7	3	50	39	9	2
1937-1941	61	28	11	1	48	40	10	2
1942-1946	46	39	12	2	45	39	12	3
Total	54	33	11	2	47	40	11	2

Source: Hungarian GGS, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2012 waves

Types of changes of family arrangements

Different forms of family structure do not show the same stability.

- Being alone** seems to be the most stable form. According to the transition matrix, almost 90% of those who are alone at 2001 retain their status during the eleven year period. This essentially means that if an individual is alone it is unlikely that they change their status and move in with somebody in old age.
- The second most stable form is of those who **live with their partner only**. Sixty-six per cent of these are still living with their partner eleven years later.
- More changes are observed among those who **live with their children only** or **with their partner and children**. Some of those who live with their children are people whose children have not yet left the parental household. Others include those whose children returned to the parental household, possibly after a divorce. And there are also those who move in together due to the health status of the parents or their financial situation. Unfortunately the data collection does not allow the distinction of these cases, therefore it is not known what motivates these changes in family structure.

2 Changing in the family arrangements by type of transition, 2001-2012

2001	2012						Total
	With partner only	With partner and children	With children only	Living alone	Other family arrangement		
With partner only	66	3	3	28	1	100	
With partner and children	48	28	11	11	2	100	
With children only	2	2	50	42	5	100	
Living alone	5	0	6	88	1	100	
Other family arrangement	42	1	5	36	16	100	

Source: Hungarian GGS, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2012 waves

The vast majority of changes in family structure were related to the loss or move of a family member and there were very few cases when the household expanded during the observed period. The main driving force behind changes in the family structure is the moving out of the children in younger cohorts, and widowhood in older groups.

3 Family arrangements during the eleven year period by birth cohort and sex

Family arrangement between 2001-2012	Male			Female		
	1932-1936	1937-1941	1942-1946	1932-1936	1937-1941	1942-1946
Alone for the whole period	3	4	6	26	20	13
In a couple for the whole period	46	42	28	17	21	22
Partner+children for the whole period	7	13	10	2	2	4
One-parent for the whole period	1	2	1	4	5	5
Lost their partner	18	9	7	31	27	17
Children moved out	13	17	32	7	10	23
Started a partnership	1	2	1	0	1	1
Moved in with children	5	3	4	4	4	4
Other	6	8	11	9	10	10
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

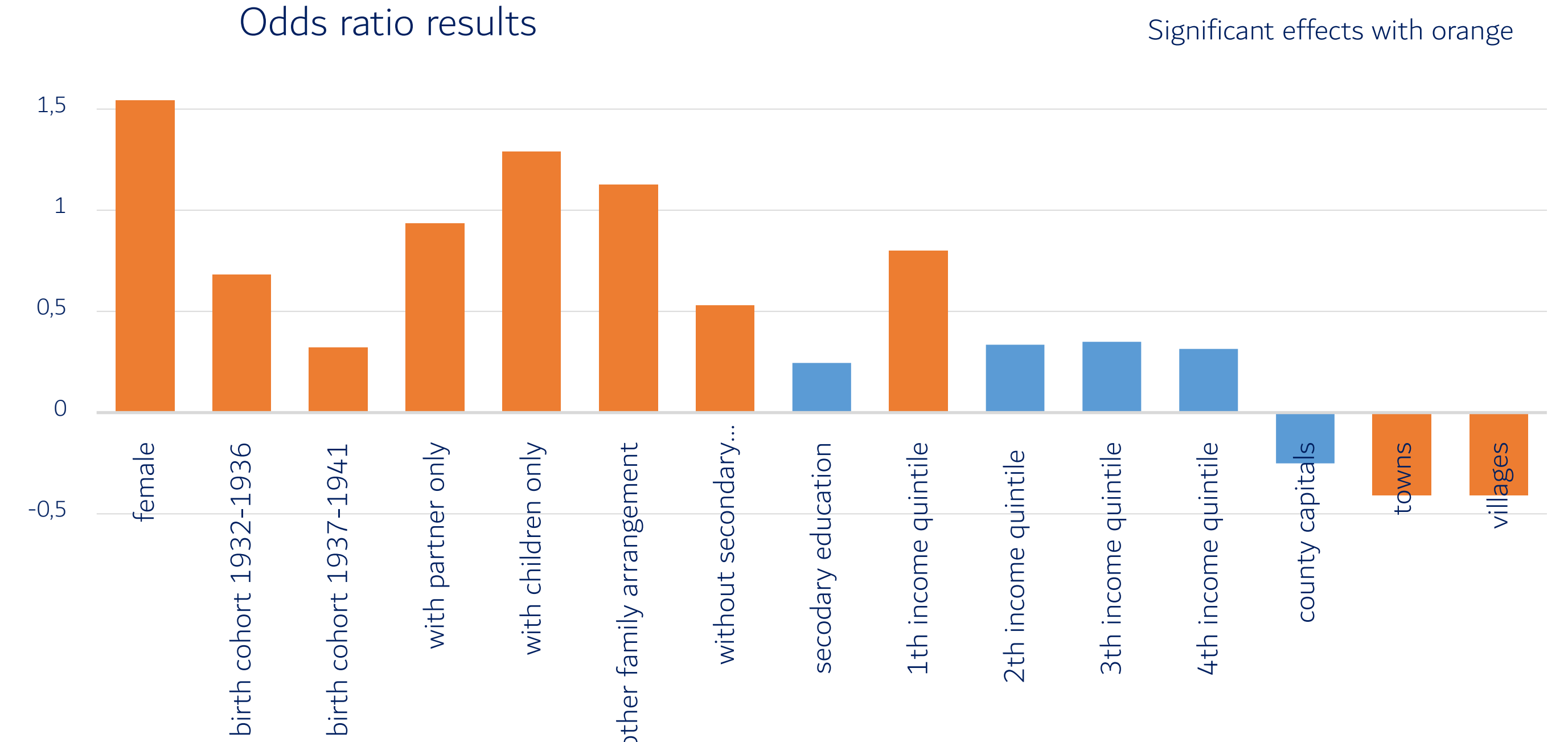
Source: Hungarian GGS, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2012 waves

Demographic and social characteristics which influence on becoming one person household

A quarter of the observed population became one person household between 2001 and 2012. Becoming a one-person household is influenced by a number of demographic and social characteristics. An obvious one is that women are much more likely to be single than men. And it is also evident that the likelihood of becoming one person household increases with age. Apart from these basic demographic characteristics, family structure at the start of the observation period also plays a key role. The largest odds ratio was found among those living with their children without partner.

As regards sociological characteristics, significant differences were found according to educational attainment and financial situation. The likelihood of becoming one person household is higher among those with lower education and among those with a less favourable income status.

4 Demographic and social determinants of living alone. Logistic regression analysis Odds ratio results



Reference group: male, birth cohort 1942-1946, family arrangement: living with partner and children, the educational attainment is degree, the highest income quintile, Budapest
Source: Hungarian GGS, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2012 waves

Main findings

Although there are fewer life events in old age than in the younger stages of the life cycle, this age also brings changes partly as a result of life events of the elderly and their children. Overall, 50 per cent of the elderly experienced at least one transition regarding their living arrangement.

- The most stable living arrangement is living alone. Only 11 per cent of the elderly moved in with their child(ren) after the one person household status, and merely 7 per cent found spouse.
- The most frequent transition type is that the child(ren) or spouse move from the household (the reason of the later are death, separation or institutionalization of the spouse).
- There are clear differences in the types of household change experienced by older women and men. The likelihood of transition is higher among the women.
- We have found demographic and social determinants which influence on becoming one person household. Females, older generations, people with lower qualifications and lower income status, the elderly who are living in Budapest have higher risk of becoming one person household than others. At the same time the number and sex of children, the number of previous marriages and the health status have not significant effect on becoming one person household.

References

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