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Article

## Three-Generation Households in a Central and Eastern European Country: The Case of Hungary

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### Abstract

Using data from censuses and a microcensus between 1980 and 2016, this study examines the trends in three-generational living arrangements, along with the factors that determine the prevalence and characteristics of the phenomenon in Hungary. Apart from the period between 1990 and 2001, the proportion of three-generation households declined in all periods among households with children. In the decade after 1990, the rate increased due to the post-transition economic recession and the severe housing shortage. The factors predicting a higher risk of three-generation households were fairly consistent across the period considered, and the direction of the effect remained stable. However, some of those factors became more relevant over time (e.g., the education level of parents and single parenthood) and some became less relevant (e.g., rural residence). Meanwhile, three-generation living is increasingly linked to social disadvantage, which is also the leading cause of poverty. This living arrangement is strongly associated with a stage in life where young people start to have children. Using data from the Hungarian Generations and Gender Survey, we determine that three-generation living affects a significant proportion of families with children at a particular, relatively brief stage in their lives.

### Keywords

grandchildren; grandparents; Hungary; living arrangements; three-generation households

### Issue

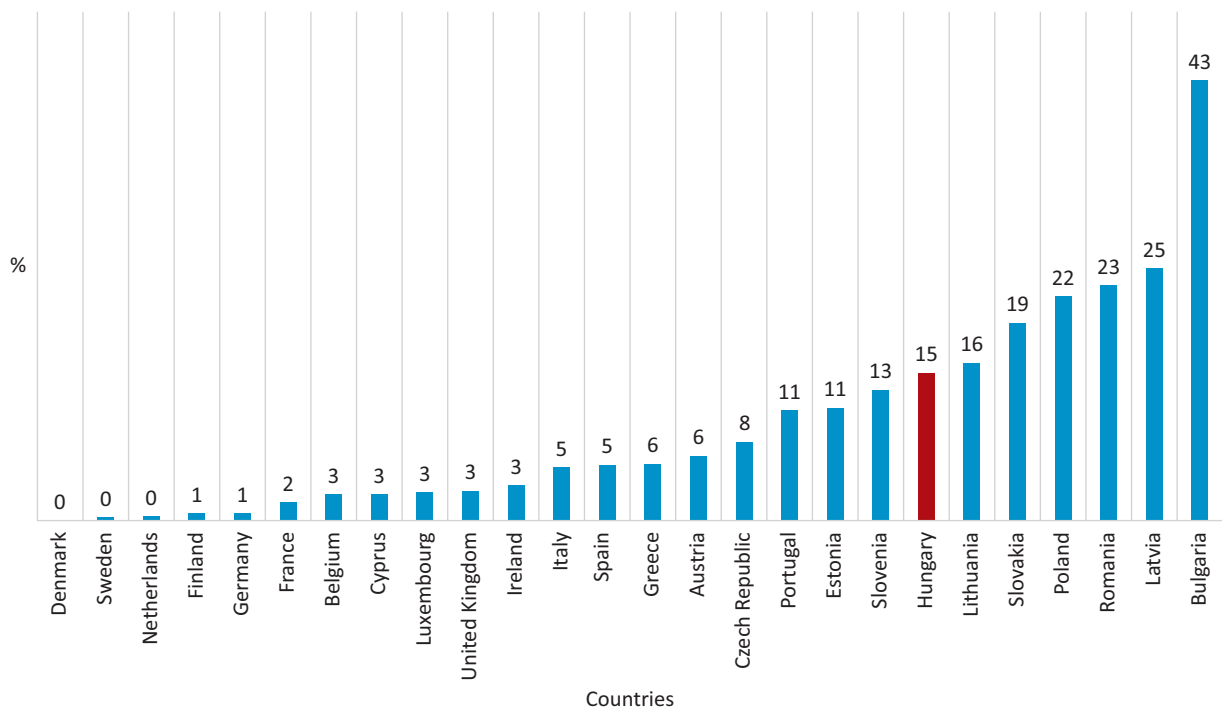
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### 1. Introduction

For centuries, three-generation households (TGHs) were a widespread living arrangement in certain regions of Europe and certain social groups (Andorka, 1996; Faragó, 2011; Laslett & Wall, 1972; Ruggles, 2003). In these households, grandparents, parents, and grandchildren lived together. Older people played as big a role in the household as either the active-age generation or younger age groups and children. In peasant societies, the basis of co-residence was mainly the family farm and involved a division of labor between household members. As the household began to decline in importance as an economic entity, there was an increase in the prevalence of nuclear families, with typically only one or two generations living together. The greater emphasis on individual earnings, the expansion of the pension system, the rise in the overall standard of living,

the change in attitudes towards multigenerational living, increased spatial mobility and certain other fundamental structural changes in society also played a part in the decline of TGHs (Goldscheider & Lawton, 1998; Ruggles, 2007). That said, co-residence remains a relevant intergenerational transfer, alongside time and money transfers in some regions of Europe, mostly in Eastern Europe (see Figure 1). Without taking account of this, we could reach an inaccurate conclusion about what older generations provide by way of support for their children/grandchildren. This is partly because sharing a home is already a transfer in itself (Dunifon et al., 2014, 2018), and partly because co-resident grandparents are considerably more likely to be caregivers than are grandparents who live apart from their grandchildren (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2001; Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997). But we also see younger members supporting the elderly: They can be a huge help, especially for very old



**Figure 1.** Share of children under the age of 18 living in a TGH, 2008 (in percentages). Source: Iacovou and Skew (2011).

people who are limited in their daily activities (Burgess & Muir, 2020).

Most of the research of recent decades indicates that a significant part of intergenerational transfers flows from the middle-aged generation to the children, and from the elderly to the middle generations and grandchildren. The elderly receive transfers from younger generations only at the very end of their lives, one form of which is that elderly people in need of care move into the households of their adult children (Choi, 2003; Hays, 2002). The coexistence of the middle-aged and elderly generations is mainly the result of life events that affect the middle generations, such as job loss or divorce (Aquilino, 1990; Choi, 2003; Ward et al., 1992; Ward & Spitze, 2007). TGHs can be a safety net for disadvantaged families with children since the members of the household can use their resources more efficiently and thus reduce the economic risk (Cross, 2018; Moffitt, 2015; Mollborn et al., 2012; Perkins, 2017; Pilkauskas & Cross, 2018). Several researchers have pointed out that the needs of the parents and grandchildren rather than of the grandparents are more strongly associated with the formation of TGHs (Albuquerque, 2011; Aquilino, 1990; Bianchi et al., 2006; Pilkauskas, 2012; Verbist et al., 2020).

Three-generation coresidence affects children’s cognitive, behavioral and educational outcomes and also their well-being (Amorim, 2019; Dunifon, 2013; Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2007; Ellis & Simmons, 2012; Foster & Kalil, 2007; Hill et al., 2001; Mollborn et al., 2012; Pilkauskas, 2014). Most research on children’s living arrangements focuses on the presence or absence of the child’s biological parents, the partnership status of the

parents, and the composition of the siblings. Additional household complexity remains understudied in most European countries. There is also very little research on the subject in the Eastern European region, even though TGHs are more prevalent in several countries there.

The aim of this article is to address previous research gaps by examining how the proportion of TGHs has changed over time in an Eastern European country, which factors determine whether a child lives in a TGH, and how durable the TGH is as a form of living arrangement. This last question is important because the point-in-time measures underestimate the prevalence of ever having lived in a TGH (Amorim et al., 2017; Cross, 2018; Pilkauskas, 2012; Pilkauskas & Martinson, 2014).

The study tries to point out that any description of the living conditions of families with children requires a much more detailed classification of households, examining those living in TGHs as a separate category. This is particularly important in Eastern European countries, including in a country like Hungary, where the prevalence of TGHs has been decreasing over time, but even today it is not insignificant and is particularly high in certain types of families with children and at certain stages of life.

In the period examined in the study, between 1980 and 2016—especially in the period after the regime change in 1990—access to housing in Hungary was difficult. One of the reasons for this is that the proportion of privately owned apartments in Hungary is extremely high. Furthermore, almost all urban municipal rental apartments were privately owned in the period after 1990. This made it exceptionally difficult to obtain an apartment, as a very serious investment was needed for someone to acquire an apartment of their own.

The difficulty in obtaining housing may be one of the reasons why the proportion of TGHs in Hungary is above the European average.

The fact that the houses built in the 1970s and 1980s—which were mainly in rural areas and in the construction of which the household itself was often heavily involved (Sik & Kelen, 1988)—were large enough also played a role in the prevalence of TGH. The owners of the houses thought that they would also provide housing for the next generations. Houses were one of the most important forms of intergenerational resource transfer (Harcza, 1991). Although gaining independence from their parents was important to the younger generations, if the younger generations could not get an apartment of their own, these houses enabled the generations to live together.

From the point of view of understanding the Hungarian context, the fact that family ties are quite strong in Hungary is also important. Parents also support their adult children through several channels (Bocz & Harcza, 2001; Harcza, 1991). According to social norms, it is completely acceptable in Hungary for grandparents to provide serious help in resolving the housing problems of families with children, even if they move in together with the younger folk.

## 2. Literature Review

Comparative European research into the prevalence and characteristics of TGHs is fairly sparse, but what there is reveals a huge difference between countries in contemporary Europe in terms of the prevalence of households with grandparents and grandchildren living together. In many Northern and Western European countries, the proportion of minor children who were living with both their parents and their grandparents in the late 2000s was around 1% to 3%, whereas in Eastern European countries it was typically over 10%; in some countries it was even over 20% (see Figure 1). In Hungary, 15% of children under the age of 18 were living with their parents and grandparents in the same household.

There are several ways of understanding the differences between countries. Research into TGHs has highlighted the influence of a country's general economic situation, cultural context, and welfare policies (Glaser et al., 2018; Preoteasa et al., 2018). At the same time, it suggests that these differences go only some way towards explaining why there is such variation in the proportion of TGHs. Presumably, various other unmeasured factors also play a part, for instance, the prevalence of familism, attitudes about residential independence, religiosity, characteristics of the housing sector, housing costs, characteristics of women's labor market participation, and spatial mobility.

It is clear that, in the vast majority of countries, the prevalence of the TGH has steadily declined over time (Glaser et al., 2018; Vasconcelos, 2003; Wall, 2004). But we can also find counterexamples in Portugal, the United

Kingdom, Slovakia, Romania, and Poland (Albuquerque, 2009; Eurofound, 2019; Glaser et al., 2018; Nandy et al., 2011). Beyond Europe, the US and Canada have also seen an increase in the proportion of TGHs (Battams, 2017; Cross, 2018; Pilkauskas et al., 2020). According to American research, the rate has increased dramatically over the last two decades (Pew Research Center, 2010; Pilkauskas et al., 2020; Pilkauskas & Cross, 2018; Pilkauskas & Dunifon, 2016). In recent times, growth in the proportion of TGHs has generally been linked to spells of economic recession (Keene & Batson, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2010, 2011).

US research has also shown that the proportion of children who have lived at some time in a TGH is much higher than is suggested by point-in-time measurements (Amorim et al., 2017; Oberlander et al., 2009; Pilkauskas, 2012). Research also indicates that the duration of three-generation co-residence is generally short (Beck & Beck, 1989; Pilkauskas, 2012), although disadvantaged children often live in a TGH more than once in their lives (Harvey, 2020; Mollborn et al., 2012; Oberlander et al., 2009).

Prior studies—mainly American research—have identified some key factors associated with living in a TGH. Regarding demographic characteristics, the research shows that TGHs are more common during early childhood (Amorim et al., 2017; Casper & Bryson, 1998; Cross, 2018; Pilkauskas, 2012), among mothers who experience teen/young-aged pregnancy (Pilkauskas, 2012; Trent & Harlan, 1994), single mothers (Cohen & Casper, 2002; Dunifon et al., 2014; Kreider, 2008; Pilkauskas, 2012), and mothers with one child (Pilkauskas, 2012). Regarding socio-economic characteristics, the TGHs are typically over-represented among households with lower income and less education (Albuquerque, 2011; Glaser et al., 2018; Pilkauskas, 2012). Some research has also revealed that TGHs are clearly linked to the rural environment (ILC, 2012; Monostori, 2021).

## 3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

Here, we address the question of how the share of TGHs in Hungary changed between 1980 and 2016. How structural changes in each period affected the process, e.g., the decline in the proportion of families with children, the shift among younger age groups to better educational qualifications, the different unemployment levels, and the changing structure of families according to the age of the youngest children and parents' partnership status.

After presenting the macro-level processes, we will also examine at the micro-level what factors make the experience of TGH likely, and how the impact of these factors has changed over time. Based on the results of the earlier literature, our hypothesis is that a low level of education of the parental generation, a low level of labor market participation, single-parent status, a smaller number of children, and the presence of infants/toddlers in the family all increases the probability

of living in a TGH. Based on the Hungarian characteristics presented at the beginning of our study and based on our previous research (Monostori, 2021), it is also likely that TGHs are more likely in a rural environment.

Then we consider how the links between demographic and sociological characteristics and multigenerational co-residence have changed over time. In this regard, our main hypothesis is that the effect of low education of parents' generation, which has the closest correlation with poverty, will become stronger over time. The reason for this is that the proportion of people with a low level of education has steadily decreased over time, but the individuals in this category have increasingly been excluded from society.

Finally, we examine how TGHs are created and whether they can be regarded as a permanent fixture or a temporary phase. As we mention above, American researchers have determined that a significant proportion of TGHs exist for a relatively short duration, and are typically associated with early childhood.

## 4. Data and Methods

### 4.1. Data

We used census data from 1980 to 2011, as well as the 2016 microcensus and the Hungarian Generations and Gender Survey (GGS). The 1980, 1990, 2001, and 2011 censuses offer a complete dataset (approximately 10 million people and 4 million households), while the 2016 microcensus covers a 10% sample of the population. The data content of the censuses is in line with international standards and provides an opportunity to examine TGHs according to basic demographic and certain sociological characteristics. The data content of the 2016 microcensus is much richer than that of the censuses, and the exceptionally large sample provides extraordinary scope for data analysis.

Here, we basically deal with those TGHs where at least one member of the youngest generation has the status of a child and is aged 0–24. There are fundamentally three reasons for this. The first is that we tried to homogenize our sample in this way, since there may be some TGHs where all three generations consist of adults—these have presumably come together for totally different reasons than if the TGH contains children. Second, we wanted to use a definition of children that is used in many other cross-country comparisons based on censuses. And finally, we realized that with this approach we could cover the vast majority (84%) of TGHs. At the same time, we could obviously use other child definitions. In Hungary, the age of majority is 18, so we could also consider those under 18 to be children. However, the age at which young people move out of the parental home has shifted significantly over the past two decades. That is why we decided on a higher age limit.

The sample was therefore restricted to those households with children aged between 0 and 24. Within these,

we distinguished TGHs and non-TGHs. TGH was defined as a household that included at least one child, one parent, and one grandparent.

The Hungarian GGS is a representative demographic panel survey, launched in 2001 and with subsequent waves in 2004, 2008, 2011, and 2016. The initial personal sample size was approximately 16,000, but this had dropped to approximately 6,300 by the 5th wave. From this sample, we selected those parents who lived with at least one child aged between 0 and 24 during the observation periods. The even narrower sub-sample included those who were living in a TGH at the time of the initial observation. In the analysis, we examined the proportion of TGHs at the different periods that were still TGHs at the end of the observation period. Since we do not have information about the changes in the household structure between two observation times, our results do not accurately reflect the occurrence of changes in the household structure.

### 4.2. Measures

The dependent variable is dichotomous: Households with two generations only are assigned a value of 0, while those with three generations are assigned a value of 1. The independent variables refer to parents and grandchildren, i.e., the middle and youngest generations. Household level variables were used. Regarding the parents' education, the parent who had the higher level of education was taken into account.

Our analysis is based on descriptive statistics, and we also use the tools of direct standardization to present the macro-processes that influence the prevalence of TGHs. In these analyses, the 1980 distribution of the population according to different variables (education attainment of parents, age of the youngest child, partnership status of the parents, number of earners) was used as a standard. These variables were chosen because they have an impact on the formation of TGHs, and there were significant structural transformations in them during the period under review.

For micro-level analysis, logistic regression models were used. In the regression models, we worked with a pooled household dataset, with data from all censuses and the microcensus. This allowed us to examine the effect of the socio-demographic variables in the interaction with a given year. Simple descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of the durability of the TGHs structure.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Trends in the Prevalence of Three-Generation Households

During the period under consideration, the share of TGHs fell from 7.5% to 2.9%. In only one census period (i.e., the years between censuses) was there no decline in

the proportion of TGHs: In both 1990 and 2001, 5.1% of households had three generations living together.

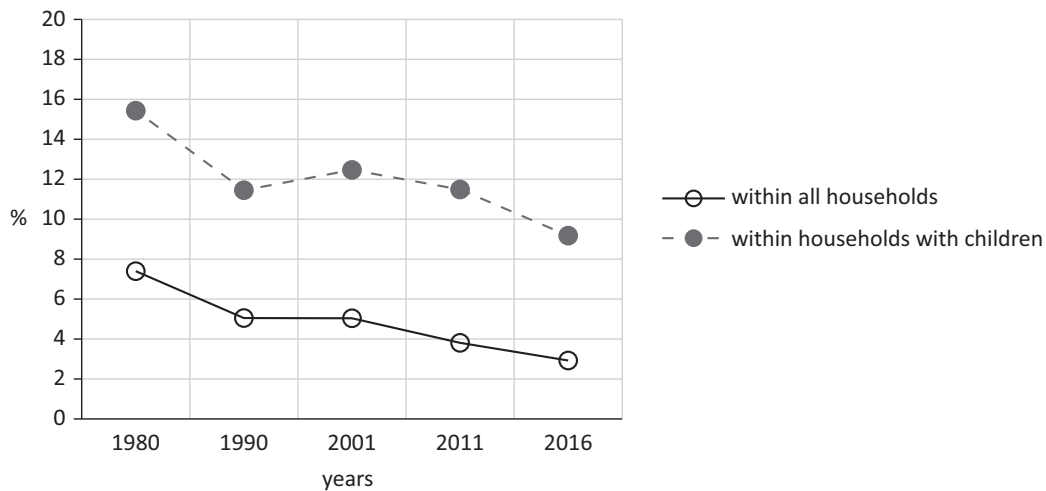
One reason for the declining trend is that the proportion of households with children also fell significantly over the observed period: In 1980, 48% of households had children, whereas in 2016 the figure was only 32%. Among families with children, the decline in TGHs moderated between 1980 and 2016, and there was actually a rise in prevalence between 1990 and 2001 (Figure 2). Overall, among households with children, the proportion of TGHs declined from 15.5% in 1980 to 9.2% in 2016.

The decline in TGHs in the 1980s was compounded both by the decline in the proportion of households with children and by the fact that among families with children ever fewer people lived in such households. In the 1990s (i.e., covering the years of economic recession following the change of regime), there was no decrease in the proportion of TGHs across all households. But behind the apparent stability, two processes were pulling in opposite directions. On the one hand, the share of households with children continued to decline. But at the same time, an increasing proportion of families with children lived in multigenerational households: In 1990, 11.5% of families with children were living in a TGH; by 2001 that figure had risen to 12.4%. This is presumably because unemployment soared in the 1990s, living standards plummeted and municipalities sold their rental housing, leaving broad sections of society facing housing difficulties. Since the 2000s, the fall in the proportion of families with children and the fact that fewer and fewer of those families live in TGHs have fuelled a significant decline in the prevalence of this form of cohabitation across all households. At the same time, we see that, between 2001 and 2011, the rate of decline was greater for all households than for households with children. This is because the extremely low fertility rates meant that the proportion of households with children dropped significantly faster than the proportion of TGHs among households with children. After 2011, following a spectacular improvement in fertility rates, due to

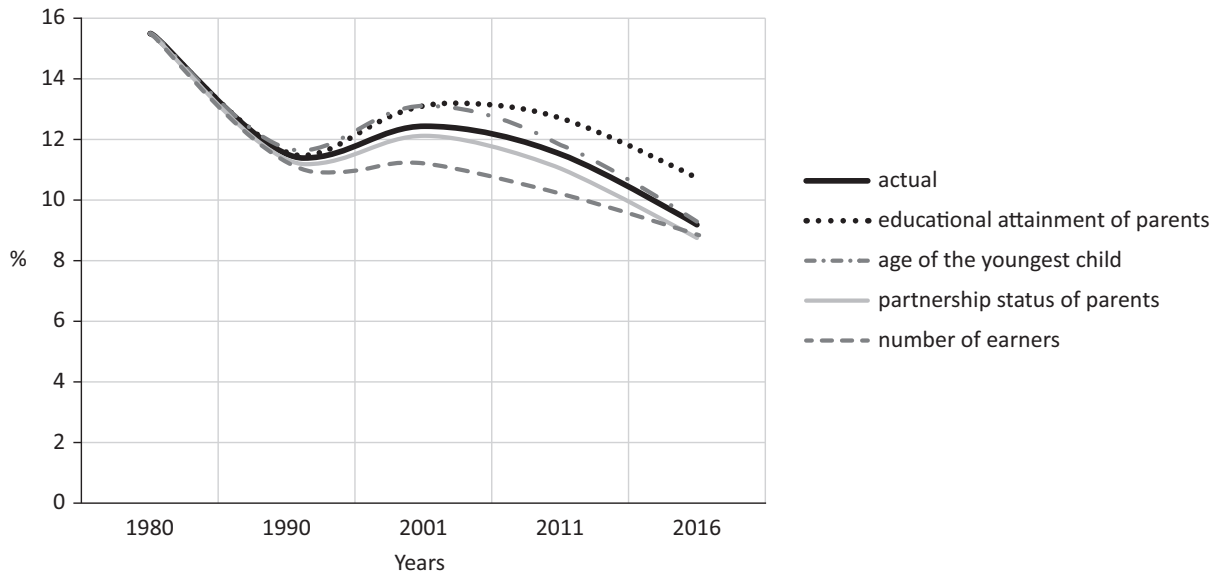
the very strong pro-natalist policy of government, the decline in the proportion of families with children slowed (Monostori & Murinko, 2018). At the same time, the share of TGHs among households with children fell more than in the period 2001–2011. These two factors explain why the rate of decline in TGHs between 2011 and 2016 was very similar among all households and households with children.

The shift in the proportion of TGHs is also related to the fact that there have been certain structural changes among families with children: Some have amplified and others have moderated the changes that would anyway have resulted from a shift in the proportion of TGHs in demographic and sociological groups. Four of the factors we examined reveal significant structural changes: the distribution of households according to the educational level of the parents; the age of the youngest child; the proportion of parents raising their children on their own; and the number of active earning parents. The effect of these structural changes was measured using the standardization method—i.e., by considering how the proportion of TGHs would have changed, if the structure of households had not changed in the period after 1980 in terms of the factors mentioned above.

Of the factors that correlated with TGHs, restructuring by educational attainment was the most significant. Between 1980 and 2016, the proportion of parents with only primary education dropped from 64.3% to 31.6%. Meanwhile, the proportion with secondary education rose from 24.5% to 35%, and with tertiary education it was from 11.2% to 33.4%. Since parents with only primary education are more likely to live in a TGH than those with higher education, the decline in the proportion of poorly educated households contributed to the decline in the proportion of TGHs in the period under review. Figure 3 compares the observed ratio of TGHs to their directly standardized counterparts. Had the structure by educational level of the middle generation remained constant, the proportion of TGHs would have declined from 15.5% to 10.7%. That is, if the structure by educational



**Figure 2.** The ratio of TGHs within all households and households with children, 1980–2016.



**Figure 3.** The actual and directly standardized ratio of TGHs. Note: The distribution of households in 1980 by each demographic and sociological factor is used as a standard.

attainment had not changed, the decline would have been smaller; but that structural change was not decisive in the decline in the proportion of TGHs.

Low fertility and the tendency over time for young people to stay with their parents for longer meant that, among households with children, the proportion of preschool-aged children (aged 0 to 6) fell over the observed period. In 1980, 43.4% of households had children aged 0 to 6, and in 1990 this figure was 32.6% (with similar proportions in the following years). This structural change certainly had some effect on the trend between 1980 and 2016. However, it did not significantly affect matters: If the structural change had not occurred, the share of TGHs would have been only 0.1% higher.

The proportion of single-parent households also changed between 1980 and 2016, although the direction of travel shows no clear trend. In 1980, among households with children, the proportion of single parents was 14.1%; by 1990 the figure had risen to 20.5%. But then the proportion of single-parent households was 19.8% in 2001, 25% in 2011, and 22.2% in 2016. This structural change did not significantly affect the proportion of TGHs, but if the proportion of single parents had not increased after 1980, the proportion of TGHs would have been slightly lower in the new millennium.

We also hypothesized that parents' labor market activity could also determine whether three generations lived together. Until 1990, the proportion of employed people in Hungary was very high—not only among men but also among women and mothers with children. In 1980, in three-quarters of households with children aged 0 to 24, both parents were active in the labor market. And in the remaining quarter, one parent worked. The proportion of households without any earning parent was below 1%. The proportion of two-earner households had fallen to 53.3% by 1990 and 38.4% by 2001—

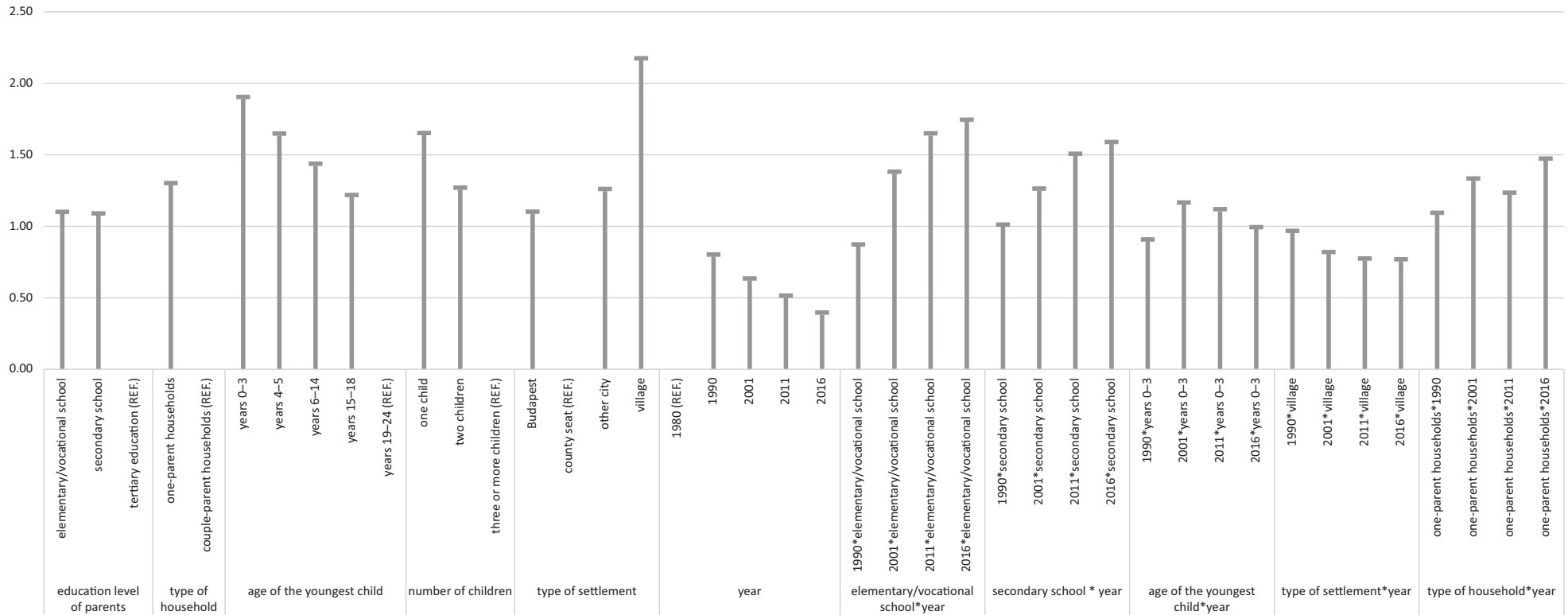
a low level that remained in 2011. At the same time, the proportion of households where neither parent worked was 7.2% in 1990, 17.8% in 2001, and 16.9% in 2011. If the employment level of parents had been as high in the years after 1980 as it was in 1980, the proportion of TGHs would have fallen more sharply.

### 5.2. Factors Contributing to the Formation of Three-Generation Households

In addition to macro-level analyses, the study also looks at which demographic and sociological characteristics increase the likelihood of TGH formation, and how their effects have changed (Figure 4). Do the differences between the years remain once we remove the effect of structural changes on the variables examined?

Assuming that the effect of each demographic and sociological characteristic also changes over time, we developed a logistic regression model that shows both the “main” effect of those characteristics and the different effect of each characteristic from year to year (interaction effect).

Similar to previous research results in Hungary, we found that the three-generation living arrangement is clearly linked to the rural environment. There are probably several reasons for this. One is that services designed to meet the day-to-day needs of older people are generally less accessible in villages than in towns, while child welfare services are also more limited. Consequently, in the countryside, generations are much more interdependent than in the cities. Also, the housing structure of villages and cities differs: Housing in villages tends to be more spacious than in towns, but it also tends to be of lower value than similarly-sized urban accommodations. Thus, there is more space and opportunity for three generations to live together; but there is also less



**Figure 4.** Demographic and sociological characteristics that determine three-generation living arrangements (results of the logistic regression models, odds ratios). Notes: Household-level data; all effects are significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level; dependent variables are non-TGHs (0) and TGHs (1).



scope for the younger generations to move away from the parental home. At the same time, it is clear that the differences by type of settlement have narrowed. This is mainly because, in the 1980s, the proportion of three-generation families in villages declined much more rapidly than in other types of settlement.

Reflecting previous research results, we find significant differences in the chances of the formation of a TGH according to the educational level of the parents. The highest odds ratio was measured in households where the reference parent had only primary education; parents with secondary education were significantly more likely to be in a TGH than those with a degree. And the differences in educational attainment have increased over time: Thus, extended households that include grandparents and grandchildren are increasingly associated with low educational attainment, which is a proxy for social disadvantage.

As well as education, we examined the effect of the parents' labor market status. To this end, we developed a variable showing how many members of the middle generation are in the labor market. Uncontrolled effects suggest that if there is no or only one working parent in the household, the likelihood of a TGH is significantly higher. However, in multivariate models, this effect is not significant, because the labor market situation is closely correlated with educational attainment and the age of the child(ren): This is because the vast majority of mothers in Hungary leave the labor market when their baby is born and remain at home until the child is 2–3 years of age.

Demographic variables suggest that this form of cohabitation may be closely associated with a particular stage in life. Previous research has shown that the number and the age of the children are strongly correlated with the emergence of a TGH: Families with just one infant or toddler are more likely to live in a TGH than those who have more or older children. The significant effect of the age of the youngest child suggests that some TGHs are formed because the middle generation cannot move away from the parental home, and so a new family is started there. However, it would also appear that the effect of the age of the youngest child varies from year to year: The economic crisis of the 1990s and the severe housing shortage meant that families with children aged 0 to 3 were more likely to live in a TGH in 2001 and 2011 than in other years. After 2010, a swathe of family policy measures sought to support young families with a small child or expecting a baby; thus, in the 2016 microcensus, the odds of multigenerational cohabitation were found to have increased much less than previously, provided the family had an infant or toddler.

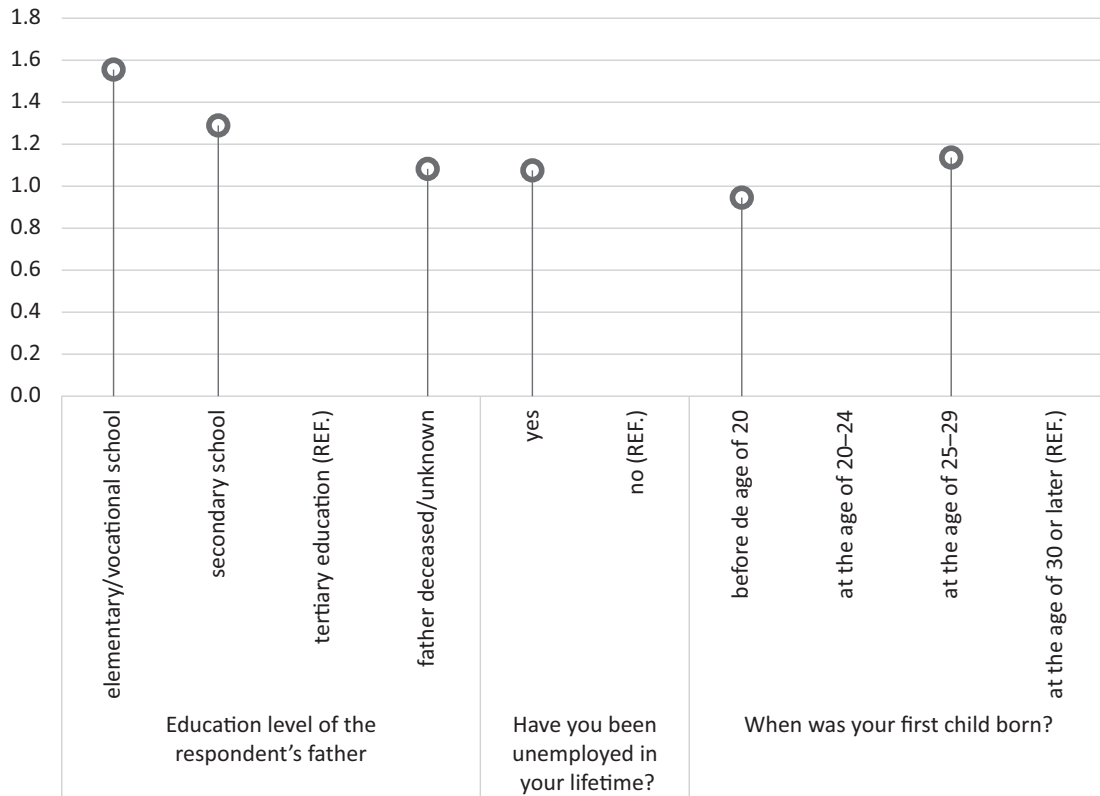
The formation of TGHs is also related to the fact that, following divorce, some parents with a child move back home to be with their own parents. Previous research in other countries also identified this effect but it is particularly strong in Hungary—and is growing stronger over time. In 2016, in particular, the risk of single-parent families living in a TGH was high.

For 2016, the regression model was supplemented by additional variables from the 2016 microcensus (Figure 5). Our multivariate model now contained individual-level data and all the variables we included in the previous models (without the interaction effect). These variables were life-course data and referred to the parents' own origins, their position in the labor market, and the age at which they had their first child. We hypothesized that those whose parents (i.e., the grandparent generation) had a lower level of education were more likely to live in a TGH than those whose parents had a higher level of education. We can assume that the social disadvantages associated with the low educational attainment of grandparents make it difficult for the middle generation to move out of their own parental home. It also increases the chances that, following divorce/separation, the middle generation will move back in with their parents, taking their children with them. Unfortunately, the data do not allow us to examine the background of both members of the middle generation: We could only examine the educational attainment of the respondent's father. The data confirm our hypothesis: Those in the middle generation whose parents had a lower level of education are more likely to live in the parental home than those whose parents had a higher level of education. It also increases the odds of three-generation co-residence if the parent (middle generation) has at some stage been unemployed (although that effect is not as strong as expected). In part, this is because the educational attainment included in the model is closely correlated with labor market status. However, it is not the whole story, since the uncontrolled effects are not very strong either. This requires further elucidation.

As a third element in the life-course data, we examined the impact of the age at which the first child was born on the likelihood of living in a TGH. Uncontrolled effects clearly indicate that the earlier someone has their first child, the more likely they are to live in their parents' home, along with their children. This is because the younger one is, the less chance one has had to accumulate the capital required for independence. However, in multivariate models, we no longer see this effect, since the correlation between the education level and the age at which the first child was born is very strong.

### *5.3. The Emergence and Duration of Three-Generation Households*

An important question in seeking to understand the nature of TGHs is how they arise and how long they last. Previous research and our own investigation both suggest that three-generation cohabitation is concentrated in the period after young people start a family. We can assume that, generally, after a few years, young people then leave their parental home. But the middle generation may move back in with their parents if something occurs (e.g., divorce or widowhood) that requires them



**Figure 5.** Life-course characteristics that determine the three-generation living arrangement, 2016 (results of the logistic regression models, odds ratios). Notes: Individual-level data; all effects are significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level.

to leave their own home (Aquilino, 1990; Choi, 2003; Ward et al., 1992; Ward & Spitze, 2007). To examine this in detail, life-course data would be needed, showing the structure of the households in which individuals have lived at various times. Such data are not available; however, we can examine some issues using data from the GGS, which followed individuals for 15 years. Moreover, after 2004, respondents were also asked how long they had lived with members of their household. The sample size of the GGS does not allow a more detailed examination by social strata and demographic groups, but it is suitable for tackling some basic questions.

The first such question is the proportion of those living in a TGH that emerged without the middle generation ever moving away from the parental home. Among respondents who lived with both their parents and their

children in one household, we found that the proportion of those who had never moved away from their parents' home exceeded 50% in all the years studied, and in the 2010s it even topped 60% (Table 1).

We also looked at how long the TGH lasts in an individual's life. Our data allowed us to examine a 15-year period, but we also considered several discrete periods. Only parents with children under the age of 25 in the household in all the waves were included in our analysis. We found that at each stage more than half (but less than 60%) of parents raising a child in a TGH were also in a TGH at the time of the next observation (see Table 2): Over 7(8) years, the figure fell to 40–50%; over (11)12 years it fell to below 40%. After 15 years, just under 30% of respondents remained in a TGH.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the middle generation living with their parents, according to how long they had lived in the parental home (in percentages).

	2004	2008	2012	2016
Never moved away from the parental home since birth	54.3	57.2	63.2	63.7
Moved back into parental home before first child born	17.4	10.4	12.7	9.7
Moved back into parental home after first child born	28.3	32.4	24.1	26.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	260	228	253	173

Source: Author's calculations based on the Hungarian GGS, waves 2–5.

**Table 2.** The proportion of those staying in TGHs from one wave to another (panel data).

Years	t ... .t + 3(4); t ... .t + 7(8); t + 11(12); t + 15			
	2004	2008	2012	2016
2001	52.5	47.6	36.5	29.0
2004	—	58.7	42.3	31.6
2008	—	—	55.9	41.9
2012	—	—	—	55.1

Source: Author's calculations based on the Hungarian GGS, waves 1–5.

## 6. Discussion and Limitations

Our study deals with the prevalence of TGHs and with the macro- and micro-level factors that determine it. Our general finding is, that the TGH has declined over time overall, but that there was also a period when growth was measurable. The proportion of TGHs in society can be influenced by a number of things. Some macro-factors have an effect over a longer period of time, while others are of short duration. European examples and specifically the Hungarian example show that it is very difficult to measure the concrete impact of one factor, as several factors act at the same time. In general, we can state that the level of welfare in society affects the proportion of TGHs: We find fewer such living arrangements in richer nations. However, if it was the overall level of welfare that had the defining effect, the difference between Western and Southern European countries would be much larger, while the figures for Eastern and Southern Europe would be far more similar. The impact of economic recession cannot be clearly demonstrated everywhere, but it was measurable in the US and the United Kingdom. It is fair to assume that in Hungary the change of regime and the subsequent economic recession in the 1990s had a major impact on certain social groups and led to a bigger increase in the proportion of TGHs.

Among the macro-processes that determine the proportion of TGHs, we should definitely highlight the age structure of society: If the proportion of children (or the elderly) in society is very low, there is less chance of such living arrangements spreading. Whereas formerly the small proportion of the elderly acted as a kind of brake on the spread of TGHs today the declining trend for families to have children operates similarly.

The needs of young people obviously play a role in the formation of TGHs. This is clear from the fact that single parents and those with lower status (with lower education) are far more likely to live with their own parents than are other social groups. In order to determine at the micro-level whether the formation of a TGH is motivated more by the needs of the younger or the older generation, we should simultaneously consider the broader family and the characteristics of its members. Since we cannot do that, we are unable to quantify which generation's needs feature more prominently in the emergence of the three-generation living arrangement.

TGHs in Hungary are also strongly associated with a stage in life when the children in the family are toddlers. Alongside the fact that TGHs are significantly more common among single-child families, this suggests that in many cases such living arrangements are linked to the period of family formation, and are not a longer-term form of cohabitation. This also indicates that far more people live in a TGH at some point in their lives than cross-sectional studies would suggest. Our analysis of the GGS panel data also indicates this, although our findings are limited by the small sample size and other content constraints.

The prevalence of TGHs may be influenced by a number of factors that we have not measured. Perhaps the most important of these is the change in attitudes toward intergenerational cohabitation and the nature and strength of the intergenerational relationship. Hungary is a country with traditional values in many respects. Family relationships play a central role in the lives of Hungarians, but that does not necessarily mean that the different generations can live together.

Nor did we examine how the physical availability of potential grandparents can change from one social stratum to another: For example, poorly educated members of the oldest generation tend not to live so long, and so may not be around to participate in a TGH. A final limitation is that we do not have data on the change in spatial mobility, which also can have an effect on the prevalence of TGHs.

Our results have several implications: The first is that more complex research into the forms of coexistence of families with children is needed. In some social groups and in certain life stages, the proportion of TGHs is high. The living conditions and well-being of the grandchildren's generation are influenced not only by whether their parents live together, whether they live in a stepfamily, and how many siblings they have but also by whether they live with their grandparents. The second implication is that there can be several macrostructural changes that can affect the trend of the prevalence of TGHs. These changes can stop or even reverse the long-term processes. Economic crises, or crises like those of the early 2020s (Covid-19, energy crisis), can strengthen family cohesion and various forms of intergenerational cooperation, thus increasing the prevalence of TGHs. Following these processes could

contribute greatly to a more accurate picture of the factors affecting children's development.

### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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