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SOCIAL DOMAIN

EMPIRICAL STUDY CONCERNING WOMEN'S POST-BIRTH RE-ESTABLISHMENT TO THE HUNGARIAN LABOUR MARKET

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Abstract: It is no longer a question today that the reconciliation of work and private life is an increasingly great problem in the lives of many people. Women returning to the labour market after maternity leave are in an especially delicate position. For this reason, we conducted a research among young mothers who would have liked to return to the world of work or have just returned recently after maternity leave. The results of our research support the idea that young mothers have great difficulties in returning to the world of work, the main reason for which are often their employers themselves, making their re-establishment all the harder.

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Introduction

In today's world, more and more people are struggling with the question of reconciling work and family life. Handling this issue is especially difficult for mothers with young children: they often face the difficult decision between putting their work or their family in the foreground. While Western European countries favour the more modern ways of thinking concerning gender roles, Hungary's attitude towards this issue is more traditional-patriarchal, while, at the same time, people are forced to behave according to the needs of a more modern life-style.

This discrepancy is clearly observable in the case of women, especially with children, as much in their performance in their traditional family role as in the production they are capable of at their work. There have been several surveys concerning work and family, as well as work and women, showing that the socialist ideal of the working mother was, and still is, handled with scepticism and difficulty by women - before and after the change of the regime in 1989. This is especially true because surveys (Pongracz, 2002) also show that the Hungarian women are equally family-centred; this is the accepted common tendency among older, as well as younger, age categories. On the one hand, the Hungarian society expects women to be role-model mothers; on the other hand, they have to actively contribute to the family budget.

It is a fact, however, that the activity of women in the Hungarian labour market is one of the lowest rates in Europe. While the employment rate of women between 15 and 64 was 59.1% in the 27 EU member states in 2008, the same rate in Hungary was a mere 50.6%, as opposed to the 71.8% of actively working women Sweden could produce.

As regards employment, women who would like to return to the labour market after maternity leave face the greatest challenge. Their chance of re-establishment is made more difficult by the fact that the time of maternity leave in

Hungary is one of the longest in Europe in general. The data from 2001 show that while the time of maternity leave is 28 weeks in the Czech Republic, 42 weeks in Greece and Ireland, 68 weeks in Luxemburg and 82 weeks in Denmark; the same time in Hungary is 180 weeks (from 2010 the regulations were changed in Hungary, the maternity leave is maximum 2 years). At the same time, research made by Balint-Kollo (2007) clearly shows that subsidies paid for child-rearing available to women irrespective of whether they stay at home or work (like GYES and GYED, the Hungarian maternity leave subsidies) increase the value of staying at home and help others to stay away from work for a longer period of time. However, from a pure national-economic point of view, this is a very costly method, which may result in women who stay away from the labour market far too long, finding their knowledge and skills out of date, their workplace no longer existing and their performance capabilities diminished, which all mean that the longer women stay away from the labour market, the less chance they will have to re-establish themselves (Bencsik and Juhasz, 2008).

Since one of the major obstacles of having children is the costs involved, families cannot ignore the question what kind of chance women have to find another job after maternity leave or how they can rebuild their career after a long absence from the labour market. It is no wonder then that we decided to conduct our research of 2008-2009 among women with young children currently on maternity leave, who would have liked to return to the world of work, or who had just started to work again after their maternity leave expired. Our present survey summarizes some of the results of that questionnaire.

Research methodology

Our empirical studies consist of two parts. Our quantitative research was preceded by a qualitative research based on deep interviews. The latter research was conducted at two reintegration programmes designed by professional and civic organizations specifically to facilitate the return to the labour market. One of the two programmes intended to

provide professional education for young mothers wishing to return to the medical sector, while the other was essentially a personality training where young mothers received primarily legal and psychological education before returning to work. Our deep interviews conducted on the premises showed that young mothers have a rather negative outlook on their chances on the labour market, which was explained by the deterioration of their professional skills, the attitude of their employers, the lack of tolerance and reduced self-consciousness.

The qualitative research of the topic was followed by a quantitative questionnaire compiled by us. 252 women were asked all together, the oldest being 46 years old, the youngest, 18. While writing the questionnaire, we were attempting to use closed questions, the majority of which contained nominal and ordinal primary scales. There were only 3 questions in total, serving to provide room for opinion forming. Our primary tool was snowball sampling, which means that although the samples are not considered to be mere coincidence, they represent the Hungarian situation quite well.

During our research, we were looking for answers to the following questions:

- Do the samples show signs of the pluralisation of family life, that is, are non-conventional social structures becoming more common?
- Is there a connection between education level and the willingness to have children, and if there is such a connection, what kind?
- How can the connection between employer and employee during maternity leave be assessed?
- What are the expectations towards young mothers returning to the labour market, and how are they able to meet expectations?

- How do young mothers see their position on the labour market?

Forming the above questions, we are now able to summarize the most important results.

As for marital status, the sample contained 179 married, 15 single and 55 women living in common-law marriage, with 2 women marking "other" form of marital status, and 3 women not giving any answer to this question at all. This means that more than a quarter (28.7%) of the women questioned lived in a non-conventional form of marital status, which means that besides marriage, the non-standard forms of living together are also frequently chosen. It can also be said that common-law marriage has only become an accepted form in Hungary in the past two decades. While in the 70s, common-law marriage was only 2.1% of all families, the same figure was over 10% in the year 2005.

In the following part, we wanted to know if there was a connection between education level and the willingness of bearing children. The highest level education received forming the basis of our sample, 8% of the women questioned finished elementary school at most, while another 8% finished secondary vocational school, 29% had school-leaving examinations, and 55% of them received higher education. The sample shows that the higher the education level, the later the woman had children. Among the women questioned, 50% of those with only primary education had their first child before the age of 20, while women with higher education had their first childbirth between 26 and 30. Women of secondary education also tended to have children first between the age of 26 and 30. The above tendencies are demonstrated in the Table 1.

TABLE 1. FIRST CHILDBIRTH AND EDUCATION LEVEL IN PERCENTAGE

Education Level	Before 20	Between 21 and 25	Between 26 and 30	Between 31 and 35	Between 36 and 40	Over 40
Primary	50.0%	30.0%	15.0%	.0%	5.0%	.0%
Secondary Vocational	20.0%	25.0%	25.0%	30.0%	.0%	.0%
Secondary Technical	11.1%	30.6%	41.7%	13.9%	2.8%	.0%
Secondary Grammar	16.2%	24.3%	43.2%	13.5%	2.7%	.0%
College	1.4%	28.4%	45.9%	21.6%	2.7%	.0%
University	1.7%	11.9%	50.8%	25.4%	6.8%	3.4%
Ph.D.	.0%	.0%	20.0%	80.0%	.0%	.0%

The majority of women are more likely to have a family after finishing their education; this raises the age of the first childbirth, which may theoretically reduce the number of actual children. For this reason, we checked whether there is any connection between the number of children and the age the mother decided to have her first child. A smaller than average, negative connection was found; meaning that women who give birth to their first child tend to have more children in the end than those who have their first childbirth at a later age. Husz (2006) found the following connection between education and childbirth: she used the Hungarian Central

Statistical Office (KSH) 1989-2004 population figures and found that the least educated people give birth to children at a relatively early age, while the higher educational levels prolong childbirth as well. At the same time, however, the observed time period of 20 years showed that people with secondary vocational training tended to postpone having a baby the most, which strengthens the notion that this social group had the most insecure labour market prospects.

The success of re-establishing women greatly depends on the employers. This questionnaire contained several questions

aiming specifically at the forms of connection between employer and employee during maternity leave. The sample showed that approximately 53% of the employers were happy to find out that their employees are expecting a baby, 30.8% of them remained indifferent towards the news and 5.7% reacted in a different way. It was, however peculiar to find that about 10.5% of the employers were not said to be happy to hear that their employees were about to go on maternity leave. We examined whether there is any connection between the way employers treated the news about the maternity leave of one of their employees, and the way they agreed upon the return of said employee. The X2 test showed a significant connection ($X^2 = 20.385$, df: 3 sign.: .000), showing that 44% of those employers being happy about the news of their employee's pregnancy also agreed with their employees about the date of their return. The same figure for employers who were indifferent towards this news was only 17%, and only 7% of them were not happy to hear about their employees' childbirth. The negative reaction of the employers can be explained by the fact that now they were forced to find a substitute for their employer. After analysing the questionnaires it became clear that 35.5% of the employers in the sample solved this problem by re-structuring the department in question, 59.2% of them hired a new employee and 5.3% chose a completely different solution to the problem of their missing workforce.

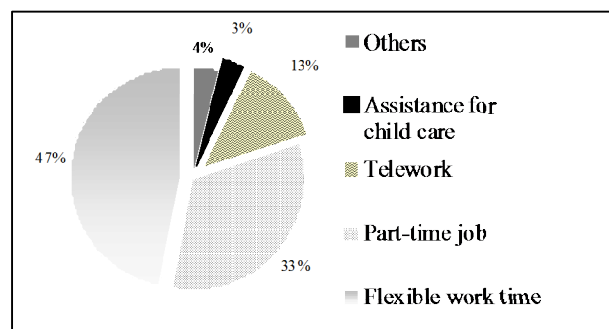
67.3% of the workplaces kept in contact with the young mothers during their maternity leave, and approximately 52.7% of the mothers did intend to return to their original place of work. We wanted to know how much these mothers were influenced in their decision by the willingness of their forms to keep in contact with them while they were at home. To find it out, we made a cross-table reference to see the connection between the two nominal variables. Using the Pearson chi-square test, we found a significant connection between the two variables ($X^2: 86.287$, df: 2, sign: .000). As regards the strength of the connection, Cramer V and the contingency-coefficient showed 0.601, and 0.515 respectively: the significance of the connection was above average strength.

If mothers wanted to return to their original job, only about 67% of their employers gave them any kind of help to facilitate the coordination of their work and family life. The Figure 1 shows the tools employers used based on frequency. The pie-chart shows that the most popular tools dealt with working hours.

We also examined the points of view young mothers considered important when choosing a job. For this reason, the interviewed people had to decide about certain factors whether they find it extremely, moderately or not important at all when choosing a new place of work. The answers show that the most important factor is to find an opportunity to be able to do their household chores besides their work (76%). They also found it important to have a secure job (62%), to have flexible working hours (58%), to find a job near their home (59%), and, finally, to have a good salary (63%). The answers prove the assumption that women work primarily for material reasons quite well. It can also be seen that a chance for career was only important for 14% of those questioned, while the offered position was also of minor importance (with only 35% finding this factor very important). The samples

also prove that career is mostly important for people with higher education (30% of them found their career important, as opposed to the less than 10% of those with secondary education).

FIGURE 1. FREQUENCY OF EMPLOYERS' TOOLS TO FACILITATE FAMILY-WORK COORDINATION BASED ON QUESTIONNAIRE



Our questionnaire paid special attention to the labour efficiency of young mothers, that is, how much they were able to meet the requirements of their would-be employer at a job interview. At this point, the interviewed people were asked questions similar to those they might receive at a real interview. The answers showed that these young mothers showed considerable reluctance regarding extra working hours and travelling, which is understandable from the point of view of their family commitments, but is extremely disadvantageous in the eyes of a future employer.

Finally, the results showed that approximately 70% of young mothers felt that having a young child was a disadvantage in the labour market. We decided to check the impact of education level on this question. A cross-table analysis showed a significant connection between the level of education and the assumption that a child is unfavourable in the labour market ($X^2 = 13.326$, $p = 0.038$, which is lower than the 5% of significance-level); however, it must be mentioned that the connection is weaker than moderate (Cramer $V = 0.234$, while the contingency-coefficient was 0.228, and $p = 0.038$).

Conclusion

The researches we made last and this year about young mothers about to return to the labour market showed that these young women face great difficulties in re-establishing themselves into the world of work; often, their own employers create obstacles for them. On the other hand, even those questioned supported the idea that firms should take the opposite direction and should support mothers instead of hindering them. A typical suggestion was that employers should choose atypical forms of employment by keeping in contact with their employees, becoming more tolerant and providing an opportunity for child-care at the workplace. We believe that these solutions would ease the above difficulties, which would be favourable for young mothers, but also for the purpose of higher employment rates, which is an organizational, as well as national, interest.

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