

**1. Suggested stream:** Nr 4. Gender Equity and Social Policy (or possibly: Nr. 13. Family Policies and the Reconciling of Paid Work and Care)

## **2. Abstract**

### ***How Long to be a Stay-at-Home Mother? – Preferences and attitudes of mothers with young children in Hungary***

Gender norms in Hungary have for long been labelled as „traditionalist” or „conservative” – especially as far as attitudes towards mothers’ role are concerned. In 2004 for example over 80% of the total population agreed that „*a child under 3 years will suffer if his or her mother works*”.<sup>1</sup> Similar findings had also been reported from a series of earlier national and also comparative surveys.<sup>2</sup>

Explanations provided by scholars to such findings are numerous, although typically hard to verify. Nevertheless, relating the concept of motherhood it is most likely that structural circumstances (long and generous parental leave system coupled by limited provision of child-care) provide at least partial explanation to the attitudes explored. Indeed, staying at home until the child’s 3rd birthday has been the most common strategy chosen by mothers in Hungary for over three decades now. Following much criticism against the situation, paid parental leave period will now be reduced from 3 to 2 years – a major change in the system that has remained (largely) stable since the nineteen-seventies.

The proposed paper will be based on 40 in-depth interviews carried out among stay-at-home mothers with children aged 2 to 3 from a mixed geographical and educational background. This unique source of information is the first one in Hungary providing qualitative data in the field and this way looking behind the mere proportions of agreement.

Common motives for becoming (temporarily) a stay-at-home mother will be identified and relating personal preferences and gender attitudes explored and their links to sociological background investigated. Preliminary analyses suggest that external motives (such as lack of appropriate childcare or employment opportunity) are hard to disentangle from internal ones (eg. personal beliefs about the needs of young children). Moreover, personal preferences are strongly interrelated with general attitudes and they are heavily influenced by the dominant ideology<sup>3</sup> of motherhood of the past decades. Nevertheless, most mothers can be located on the continuum (created inductively) between “staying at home by necessity” and “staying at home for personal commitment”.

Findings are expected not only to help to assess possible consequences of the ongoing reform of the parental leave system in Hungary, but also to contribute to our general understanding of how personal choices of young mothers are made and gender role attitudes get constructed.

## **3. Contact details:**

Name: Zsuzsa Blaskó

Affiliation: Research Fellow – Demographic Research Institute

Email: zsblasko@gmail.com

Address: 1192 Bercsényi utca 48, Budapest HUNGARY

Phone: +3630-816-4329

---

<sup>1</sup> Generation and Gender Panel Survey, Hungary, 2nd wave

<sup>2</sup> See various publications from Pongrácz, M; Tóth, O; Blaskó, Zs.

<sup>3</sup> See works by Adamik, M.