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Relationship patterns and having children

Introduction

Hungarian society is fundamentally family-oriented in its thinking, and regards having children and family relationships as a value. The increasingly negative demographic trend begun in the 1980s included a decline in the number of marriages, an increase in divorces and a declining willingness to have children. Then in 2010 a marked improvement began. Despite the previous lows, research has found that the perception of marriage has remained favourable over the last forty years, with a larger number of children perceived as the ideal and a higher number of children wished for (see, for example, S. Molnár 2011; Kapitány and Spéder 2018; Engler 2018; Kopp and Skrabski 2020). At the same time, public attitudes have become increasingly accepting of unmarried cohabitation and having children outside marriage (see, among others, Kapitány and Spéder 2018). Cohabitation was the preferred form of living arrangement relationship after divorce or widowhood in previous years, but since the 1990s it has become a form of relationship before marriage (trial marriage) or even a substitute for it (Kapitány and Spéder 2018; Murinkó and Spéder 2021). S. Molnár (2011) pointed out that marriage is still preferred among the population, but that public opinion is much more permissive towards cohabitation before marriage. This was also confirmed by Engler's (2018) research among university-educated young people: although the younger age group postpones any intention to marry, they consider marriage as something to come in part after cohabitation or as an immediate decision once the right partner is found.

Since the 2010s, the public perception of couples and family formation in Hungarian society seems to be reflected once again in the statistical data. The number of marriages is at a 40-year high, the number of divorces is at a 60-year low, and the total fertility rate, which measures the propensity to have children, has improved from its 2010 low to a growth level not seen in other European countries (Kapitány and Spéder 2018).

The number of children wished for in Hungary is high. In the 2013 Hungarostudy data (Susánszky and Szántó 2013), the average number of children among young people with children is 1.77, and the number of children wished for among them is 2.04, including the children they already have. The results of the survey confirmed that young Hungarians still tend to follow traditional principles, with the majority of young people in the sample (98.1 percent) considering "two people living in a marriage and raising a child" to be a family, and 91.9 percent considering "two people of different sexes living together as partners and raising a child" to be a family. However, it can also be seen that for 68.1 percent of respondents, getting married before having children is not seen as having significance.

Highly educated women are more likely to marry and cohabitations are also more likely to end in marriage for couples in which at least one of the partners has a university degree (Lundberg and Pollak 2015). While the extended period of studies is compensated for in relatively short periods as concerns relationships by those with a higher education, this is less likely to be the case for planned childbearing, especially for women. Women with a degree have their first child later (Götmark and Andersson 2020; Veroszta and Györgyi 2021; Cheng et al. 2022), which reduces the chances of having a second child. Despite this, more children are born among those with tertiary education than among those completing secondary education.

Finding the right partner is important for both stable relationships and having children. Various surveys (such as the series of the Hungarian Youth Survey) highlight the growing number of young people who are single. Rövid (2018) argues that changes in relationship patterns, the prolongation of founding a family and the increase in education level favour the growth of singlehood, which is most often not a deliberate plan or hope. For example, Engler's (2018) research mentioned above shows that a significant majority of young people want to be in a relationship, and almost all of the single respondents surveyed at the time of the survey were also certain that they would like to have children. A similar result was found in the latest Hungarian Youth Survey 2020, in which 6 percent of single respondents at the time of the survey rejected the idea of getting married, and around 90 percent were definitely planning to have a child (Engler and Pári 2021). There is a strong correlation between intention to have children and relationship status. According to Kapitány and Spéder (2018), the absence or existence of a relationship, its stability and form have a significant impact on personal life plans, especially on having children: within marriage or in a stable relationship, children wished for are born and even more children are born. According to national statistics, more children are born in marriage than outside of marriage, and more than half of all children are born into marriage. Overall, it can be said that of all forms of relationships, marriage is the most conducive to starting and expanding a family, and single people are not shying away from it when they find the right partner. In our study we investigate the relationship between relationship patterns and the propensity to have children using the Hungarostudy 2021 database.

Methods

In our analysis, we used questions on relationships and having children from a sub-sample of responses coming from a sample of 2,000 respondents aged 18-40, as well as the demographic block of the main questionnaire.

In our study, we conducted both univariate statistical analyses (basic distributions) and bivariate analyses, the latter using cross-tabulation and analysis of variance. The variables we examined were typically at nominal measurement levels, so we basically used cross-tabulation analyses to look for statistical relationships between variables. In all cases, the significance value of the Pearson's chi-square (χ^2) test was indicated for the cross-tabulation analysis, while the significance value of the Anova test was indicated for the analysis of variance.

In addition to univariate and bivariate statistical procedures, multivariate models were also used to examine the effect of explanatory variables on the dependent variable. For the logistic regression model, both exp(B) and significance values are reportedindicated. To perform the logistic regression test, we used continuous and dummy variables, the latter coded as follows: sex 0=female; 1=male), married (0=not married; 1=married), cohabiting (0=not cohabiting; 1=cohabiting), living alone, in a relationship (0=living alone, no relationship; 1=living alone, in a relationship), type of settlement (0=village, large town, city; 1=county seat, capital), education (0=less than tertiary education; 1=tertiary education or doctorate), financial situation (0=below average or average net monthly income; 1=above average net monthly income), religion (0=not religious or does not practice religion in a church; 1=practices religion in a church), whether or not they have children (0=no children; 1=have children).

Since the aim of our study is to examine the evolution of the propensity to have children by relationship status, we present the characteristics of the groups according to the relationship status at the time of collection. The groups were constructed using the answer options given for the question "What is your marital status? Please tell me your actual status, not the official one." Respondents could choose from the following options:
• unmarried, single, no cohabiting partner;
• unmarried, single, cohabiting with a partner;
• married, living with a spouse;
• married, cohabiting with a partner;
• married but separated, no partner;
• divorced, no partner;
• divorced, cohabiting with a partner;
• widow, no partner;

• widowed, cohabiting with a partner.

Our hypothesis is that family formation and family extension plans and their implementation are closely related to the current relationship situation of the individual. We hypothesise that relationship stability increases the propensity to have children and the propensity to have more children.

Results

Sociodemographic characteristics of relationship forms

Based on the previously described formed groups according to relationship status, respondents can be clearly classified as married, cohabiting or living alone (which in this case essentially indicates living in a single or separate household in addition to being in a relationship). Analyses with these three groups show that the ones living alone does not behave as a homogeneous unit, as the (non-cohabiting) relationship may influence family formation plans. Therefore, using the relationship aspect ("Are you in a relationship or not?") asked in the second part of the questionnaire, we split the group of people living alone into two groups. The resulting sub-samples to be analysed represent partly the legal marital status and partly the household characteristics, supplemented by the current relationship status for those living alone (Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of the groups surveyed (number, percentage, n = 1991)

Name of the group	Marital status, household/relationship characteristics	Persons	Percentage %
Married	Married, living with spouse	504	25.3
Cohabiting with a partner	Unmarried, cohabiting with a partner Married but cohabiting with another partner Divorced, cohabiting with a partner Widow, cohabiting with partner	520	26.1
Living alone, in a relationship	Single, no cohabiting partner and in a relationship Married but separated No cohabiting partner but in a relationship Divorced, no cohabiting partner, but in a relationship Widowed, no cohabiting partner, but in a relationship	242	12.2
Living alone, single	Single, no cohabiting partner and no relationship Married but separated No cohabiting partner and no relationship Divorced, no cohabiting partner and no relationship Widow, no cohabiting partner and no relationship	725	36.4
Total		1991	100.0

When examining the demographic background of the subsamples (sex, age, education, type of settlement, religiosity), significant differences are found in all cases based on the chi-square test. Apart from presenting detailed data, we shall summarise the characteristics of the subsamples. Among the married population, there is a higher proportion of women, respondents in their thirties, who tend to live in smaller settlements (towns or villages). In terms of education, they have similar proportions of primary, secondary and tertiary education. The proportion of women in cohabiting relationships is higher than that of men. The majority of respondents are aged between 30 and 39 years, have primary or secondary education and live in a city, although those living in the capital and in a village are also highly represented in this group.

More than half of those in a relationship and living alone are male, with the highest proportions in their twenties, have a secondary education and live in a city. The largest proportion of single people living alone are male, aged between 18 and 29, with a secondary education and living in a city, but there is also a high proportion living in villages or county seats.

Evolution of the ideal and planned number of children by type of relationship

Looking at the evolution of the number of children within the four groups, it is clear that the average number of children is highest in marriages (1.51), much lower among cohabiting couples though slightly above the sample average (0.79), and well below in the other two subsamples (Table 2). The existence or stability of a relationship therefore increases the probability of having children and the number of children.

Table 2: Number and percentage of children in groups by relationship status(chi-square test, significance level = 0.000)

	Parents raising a child		Average number of children
	percentage (%)	number of people (persons)	
Married	77.9	392	1.51
Cohabiting with a partner	44.6	229	0.79
Living alone, in a relationship	5.4	13	0.11
Living alone, single	7.5	54	0.13

The number of children that respondents perceive as ideal and the number of children they plan to have differs from the actual situation at the time of the survey (number of children already born), the question is how the ideal, the desired and the number of children realised by the time of the survey evolve per group.

Married respondents have the highest number of children in their ideal family, with an average of 2.26 (Table 3). However, they are closely followed by those living alone and in a relationship rather than those cohabiting with a partnerwith an average of 2.24 children. Single people living alone have an ideal number of 1.88 children, which is the lowest average in this range, but still high in demographic terms. The ideal number of children - regularly high in Hungarian society - is therefore the highest for married couples, but the perception of a large number of children among respondents who are not living in a household but in a relationship deserves special attention - the question is whether they are equally family-centred in their definite plans.

When examining childbearing plans, it is important to stress that for those with children, the series hides shows the number of additional children planned, while for those without children, it hides the total number of children planned.

Table 3: Realised, ideal and projected planned number of children in the study groups (mean, Anova test = 0.000, all columns)

	Realised average number of children	Average number of children considered ideal	A(Additional) average number of children planned
Married	1.51	2.26	1.59
Cohabiting with a partner	0.79	2.14	1.75
Living alone, in a relationship	0.11	2.24	2.08
Living alone, single	0.13	1.88	1.91
All respondents	0.65	2.09	1.84

At the time of the survey, single people in a relationship with the fewest children not only envision having the most children in the ideal family, but also in their own lives. What singles living alone, envision, though a much larger number, lags behind. The lack of a partner likely does not only to make their personal plans uncertain, but also overshadows their ideal.

More surprising is the idea of cohabiting couples: in their case, slightly more planned children would be expected, as more than half of them do not have children yet, though they are in a serious relationship. The average of 1.51 children already born to 80 percent of married couples explains the under-planning. Since they are counting on additional offspring beyond the number of child-ren they have already had, the number of planned offspring is, by definition, smaller than the number of offspring that the childless have yet to have. However, the sum of the average number of children born to married respondents and the average number of additional children planned (3.1!) is far above the number of children they consider ideal - no similar example is seen in any other relationship group. The apparent discrepancy may be due to the fact that the question on the ideal number of children in the family refers to the overall social model, while the answer to the question on the planned number of children reflects the individual decision based on his/her own life situation.

This suggests that there is not always a clear correlation between family formation plans (ideal and planned number of children) and the perceived progress of the relationship (from dating to cohabitation to marriage). In support of our hypothesis, the question regarding the near future ("Do you plan to have children in the next five years?") shows the expected direct proportionality: 95 percent of married couples, 90 percent of cohabiting couples, 55 percent of those living alone in a relationship, and 35 percent of those living alone without a relationship answered a clear yes to this question.

It is clear from the family formation and family expansion ideas that married respondents are the "leaders of the population list", as they have the highest numbers of children born, the highest ideal number of children and the highest total number of children planned. The "quasi-married" cohabitants lag behind them in terms of realisation and plans, and at some points are even overtaken by those dating. The lower (more cautious?) estimates of unmarried singles can be explained by their living situation (no one to plan with at the moment), but also by their ideas of independence. The results suggest that the relationship connection between childbearing propensity and relationship status varies along the lines of the "solidity" of plans. The ideal number of children, formulated in general terms, gives more room to manoeuvre for of those in a relationship, but the specific short-term plan orders the indicators according to the assumed strength of the couple's relationship forms.

Childbearing plans by relationship status and number of children raised

Continuing the previous line of thought, another question is used to observe how the presence of a child(ren) in the household may influence having (additional) child(ren) in each sub-sample. In answer to the question "Do you want and plan to have more children?", the answers yes and no could be selected with the option of desire and possibility cancelling each other out (you wish for it in your heart but no longer plan to have children) (Figures 1 and 2). The latter option was selected by relatively few (around 10 percent) in all four groups, mostly by those with children. Among the respondents living alone and singleand single respondents with children, not only does this response category stand out compared to the others (13 percent), but the option "do not want and do not plan to" also stands out. This, among many other difficulties faced by single parents, points to a reluctance to have more children and the uncertainty surrounding it. Note the more optimistic assessment of single parents with children who are in a relationship.

Figure 1: Childbearing plans of those with children by relationship status
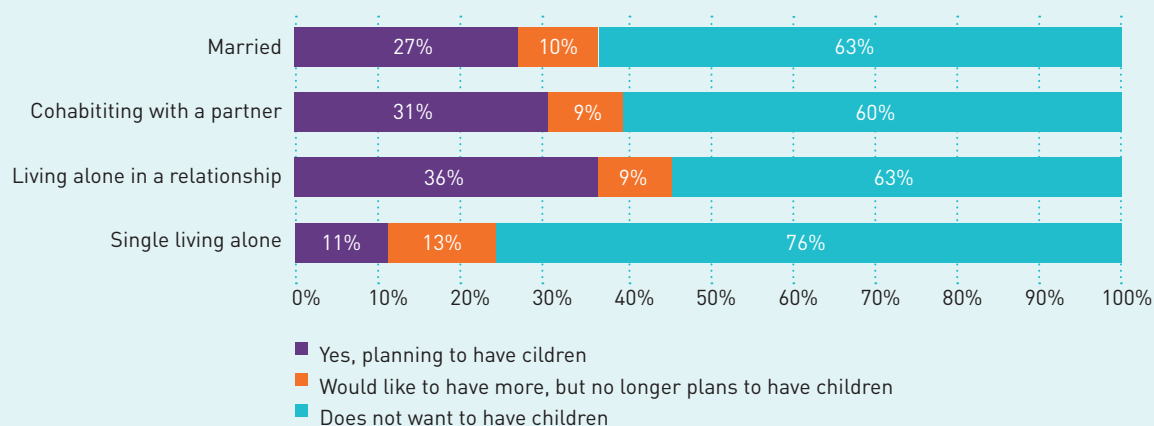*(%, n = 661, chi-square test, significance level for all subsamples = 0.000)*

Yes, planning to have cildren
Would like to have more, but no longer plans to have children
Does not want to have children

Figure 2: Childbearing plans of those without children by relationship status
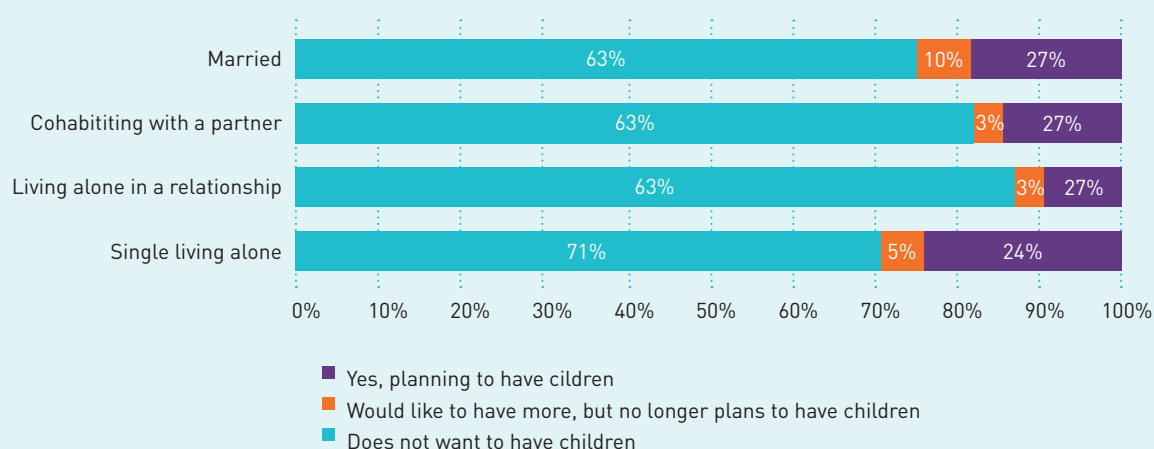*(%, n = 1822, chi-square test, significance level for all subsamples = 0.000)*

Yes, planning to have cildren
Would like to have more, but no longer plans to have children
Does not want to have children

Figure 3: Percentage planning to have a child in the next five years; those who already have a child
(%, n = 175, chi-square test, significance level = 0.2500)
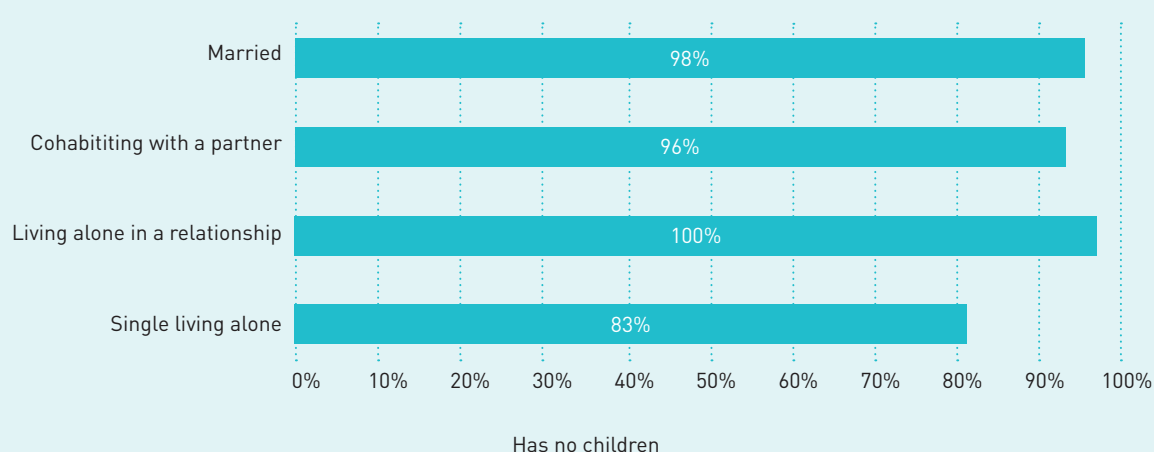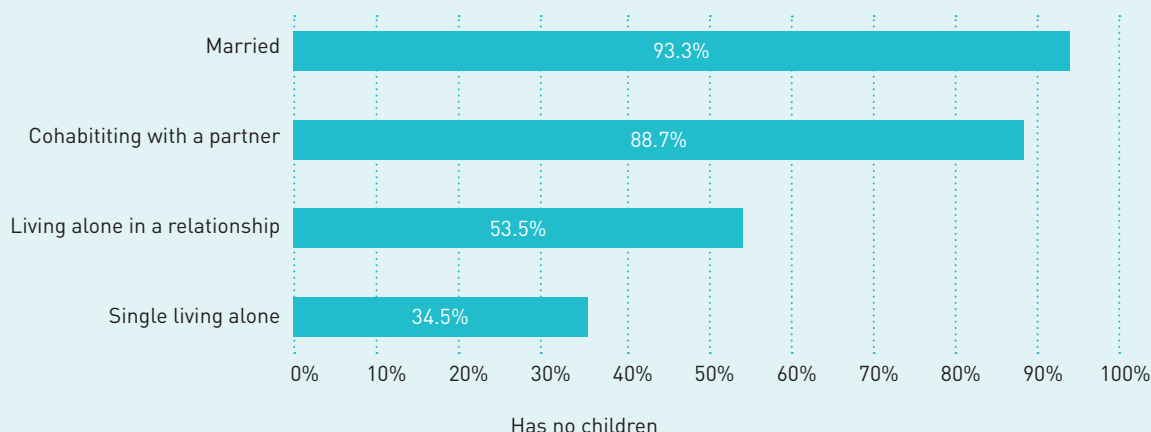

Has no children

Figure 4: Percentage planning to have a child in the next five years; not yet having a child (%, n = 809, chi-square test, significance level = 0.000)

Among childless singles, those in a relationship are also more likely to be planning to have children (nearly 90 percent of the 202 persons appearing here), rather than singles without a partner (71 percent of the 585 persons). We have already noted the high propensity of singles in a relationship to start a family; here too, their commitment is high compared with other groups, both those with and without children.

Married and cohabiting couples have similar ideas concerning childbearing plans. In this context, the plans of cohabiting couples exceed those of married couples for the first time, with a 7 percent higher proportion of cohabiting couples without children and a 3 percent higher proportion of cohabiting couples with children planning children. However, if we ask this question as pertaining to the next five years, offering two options (yes, no), the picture changes again. Figures 3 and 4 portray the basic hypothesis of our study, which is that as relationship (perceived) stability increases, so does the propensity to have children, and as can be seen, this is the case regardless of whether children have already been born. Looking to the foreseeable future, married couples are confident of (further) childbearing (irrespective of the number of children they have),

closely followed by cohabiting couples. Among singles, those with children are the most likely to have plans.[1]

In the following analysis, we use a logistic regression method to examine the sociodemographic factors that influence the intention to have children within five years. Thus, the dependent variable in the regression model was the plan to have a child within five years, while the explanatory variables were sex, age, relationship status, type of settlement, education, financial status, religiosity and whether the respondent has children.

To detect multicollinearity, we examined the relationship between the relationship status variable (married; cohabiting; living alone, in a relationship; living alone, single) and the dummy[2] and continuous variables included in the regression model (Table 4).

As mentioned earlier, married respondents are typically female, over 30 years old, mostly living in smaller settlements (towns or villages), with nearly a third having a tertiary education, a significantly higher proportion than other relationship groups, and the highest proportions of above-average income, religious and with children. Among the respondents in a cohabitant relationship, there are slightly more women than

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[1] *It should be noted that this question was answered by fewer respondents than before, so the number of elements for single parents with children was lower than before (4 and 6), which may distort the results.*

[2] *Dummy variables: sex, married, cohabiting, living alone, in a couple, type of settlement, education, financial situation, religious affiliation, whether they have children; continuous variable: age.*

men. Women are slightly more likely than men to be in a cohabiting relationship. Their average age is lower than that of married respondents (thirty-one years), they also live mainly in larger settlements and nearly half of them have children. A lower proportion of them than married respondents have a tertiary education, a slightly lower proportion have an above average income and a lower proportion are religious, but significantly higher than those living alone.

More than half of those living alone but in a relationship are male, with an average age of twenty-five, the youngest age group compared to the other subsamples. They typically live in smaller settlements and one fifth of them have a tertiary education. Most have above average incomes and are religious. This group has the lowest proportion of children.

Single people living alone are typically male, with an average age of twenty-six. Most of them live in smaller settlements and only 16 percent have a tertiary education. They tend to be above average income earners and have the lowest proportion of religious believerspeople compared to the other sub-samples. The proportion with children is 7.5 percent.

Table 4: Demographic characteristics of the relationship status subsamples (n = 1990, chi-square test, percentage distributions, with mean for age)

	Married	Cohabiting with a partner	Living alone, in a relationship	Living alone, single	Level of significance
Sex	Male: 36.7 Female: 63.3	Male: 48.5 Female: 51.5	Male: 55 Female: 45	Male: 62,2 Female: 37.8	0.000
Age	Average age: 33.47	Average age: 31.04	Average age: 25.03	Average age: 26.47	0.000
Type of settlement	Living in a larger settlement (capital or county seat): 37.7 Living in a smaller settlement (smaller town, village): 62.3	Living in a larger settlement (capital or county seat): 45 Living in a smaller settlement (town, village): 55	Living in a larger settlement (capital or county seat): 38.8 Living in a smaller settlement (smaller town, village): 61.2	Living in a larger settlement (capital or county seat): 42.6 Living in a smaller settlement (smaller town, village): 57.4	0.083
Education	Male: 62.2 Primary and secondary: 68.3 Tertiary	Primary and secondary: 70.1 Tertiary: 29.9	Primary and secondary: 80.2 Tertiary:	Primary and secondary: 83.9 Tertiary: 16.1	0.000
Financial situation	Average or below average: 27 Above average: 73	Average or below average: 32 Above average: 68	Average or below average: 30.9 Above average: 69.1	Average or below average: 29.7 Above average: 70.3	0.579
Religious	Not practising religion: 61.7 Religious: 38.3	Not practising religion: 67 Religious: 33	Not practising religion: 70.8 Religious: 29.2	Not practising religion: 72.7 Religious: 27.3	0.001
Successor	Have children: 77.9 No children: 22.1	Have children: 44.6 No children: 55.4	Have children: 5.4 No children: 94	Have a child: 7.5 No children: 92.5	0.000

In the following, we examine the effect of these dichotomous background variables on childbearing within five years using logistic regression (Table 5). No significant difference was found between the short-term childbearing plans of the male and female respondents. However, age as an explanatory variable appears to be a significant factor, as the older the respondent, the more likely he or she is to plan to have children within five years. Significant differences in plans were found by relationship status. Compared to the reference group included in the regression, i.e. singles living alone, all groups are significantly more likely to plan to have children. Married people are the most likely to plan to have children in the near future, followed by cohabiting couples and those in a relationship.

While the type of settlement does not affect childbearing plans, the role of education is significant. It emerges that those with higher levels of education, especially tertiary education, are significantly more likely to plan to have children in the next five years than those with lower levels of education. Financial situation also shows a correlation with plans, with those with average or below-average incomes typically planning to have children in the short term. The results show that religiosity is a significant driver for having children within five years. Whether the respondent has children or is childless does not significantly affect plans to have children within five years.

Discussion

The aim of our study was to investigate relationship status and willingness to have children. Our hypothesis that family formation and family extension plans and their realisation are closely related to the current relationship status of the individual was confirmed. The presence or absence of a relationship is a fundamental determinant of private life plans, and the stability and form of the relationship is also a guiding factor (Kapitány and Spéder 2018). In line with relevant research (Kapitány and Murinkó 2020; Kopp and Skrabski 2020), we assumed that the stability, depth and perspective of a partnership is outlined by decisions taken in the relationship at different 'stages', such as becoming legally a couple, moving in together or dating. Our results show that relationship stability clearly increases the likelihood of having children,

Table 5: Reasons influencing the intention to have children within five years (logistic regression exp(B)-s and significance level, n = 1990; reference group: single people living alone)

Explanatory variables	Exp. B.	Significance level
Sex	0.723	0.190
Age	1.149	0.000
Married	9.709	0.000
Cohabiting with a partner	11.428	0.000
Living alone, in a relationship	5.145	0.000
Type of settlement	0.889	0.648
Education	5.575	0.000
Financial situation	0.311	0.000
Religious	2.115	0.007
Children	2.528	0.105
Nagelkerke R square	0.592	

as the average number of children and the average number of children perceived to be ideal are highest in marriages (1.51 and 2.26 respectively), and 95 percent of young married adults aged 18-40 plan to have another child within five years. The factors that influence having a child within five years include age, relationship stability, education, financial situation and religious attitudes. The logistic regression results show that older respondents, those in more stable relationships, those with higher levels of education but less favourable income status and religious respondents are the most likely to plan to have children within five years. Our results also confirm the trend that religiosity has a positive effect on childbearing, including the probability of having a child within five years (Tárkányi 2006).

Summary

Our findings showed that married couples clearly stand out among the relationship groups, both in terms of the number of children already born and the number of children they would ideally like to have, and are the most likely to plan to have children in the next five years. They are followed by respondents who live alone but are in a relationship, indicating that cohabiting couples represent a significant demographic potential, both in terms of their future marriage to make their relationship stable and their willingness to have children. A detailed understanding of their characteristics and plans deserves further investigation. The large number of unmarried people in the sample are, for understandable reasons, the most cautious and, under other assumptions, the most pessimistic in their plans. Closer examination of this is also an important task. In the course of the analysis, it was noticed that for the plans asked in general (whether they would like to have children, what the ideal family would be like, how many children they plan to have), the assumed order is disrupted, with the married followed not by cohabitants but by those perceived having looser relationships. For the foreseeable future, however, the ideas are ordered according to the strength of the relationship.

The description of the relationship categories used in our study is more nuanced than common interpretations, for example, the relationship of steadily dating couples can be as stable and future-oriented as that of couples who are already living together or married. In this study, we have not examined the quality of relationships, but we plan to add this to our analysis in the future.

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