

Long-term demographic change and local socio-cultural patterns: household structure in 19–21st century Hungary

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Research questions

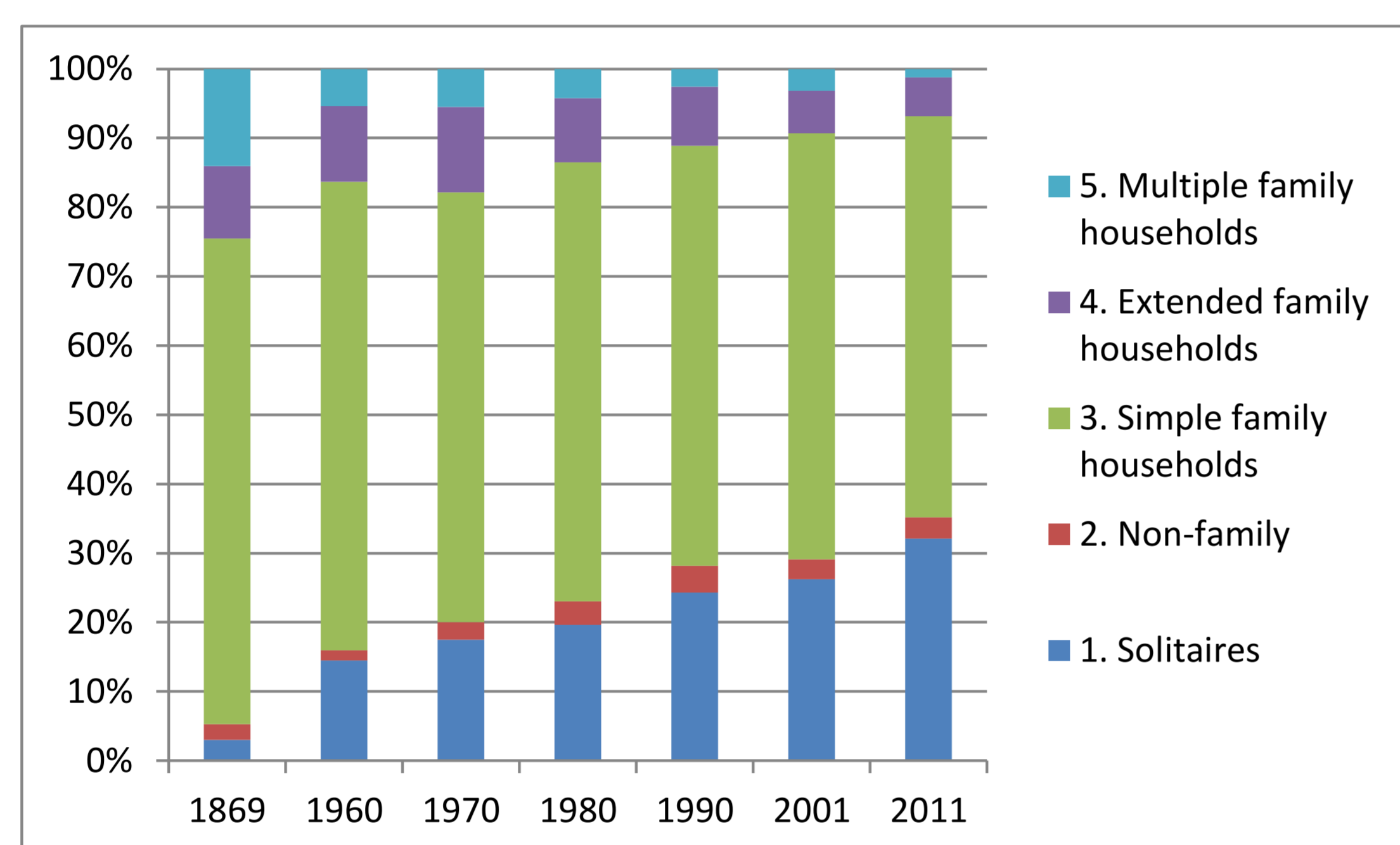
Research on historical household structure and the rules and patterns of household formation have been a central field of family history and historical demography since the 1960s. Their changes in the 20th century can also reveal some key elements of modern societies and thus it can be considered an important research field of contemporary demography too.

Hungary is regarded as a typical area in John Hajnal's 'eastern' marriage and household formation pattern which was characterised by early marriage and complex household structure. Early marriage has been proved to survive until the 1990s, whereas the survival of households with more nuclear families has been rarely examined in Hungary so far.

In this paper we investigate the frequency of extended and multiple family households (nuclear family + other relatives or more nuclear families living together in a common household) and we seek for the explanatory variables of these more complex household types. Doing this we aim to explore the impacts of demographic transition, socialist industrialisation and political, social changes at the end of the 20th century on the patterns of co-residence.

Results 1: Changes of household structure over time

Figure 1 The distribution of households by the Laslett-Hammel classification, Hungary, 1869-2011



The decisive change in household structure happened before the second half of the 20th century. As a consequence of the modernisation process, the share of more complex household types had declined by 1960 and that of one-person-households had in parallel increased. The first change involved the diminishing share of multiple family households, while that of extended type did not change considerably. The frequency of co-residence with one or more unmarried, widowed or divorced relatives began to decrease from the 1970s onwards. The increase in the proportion of one-person-households seems to be permanent and linear. Its source was first of all the decreasing number and share of the more complex forms. The percentage of simple family households also decreased somewhat but this process has become pronounced mainly since 1960.

Results 3: The determinants of household structure

Table 1 Multivariate linear regression analysis for the proportion of extended and multiple family households (data at settlement level)

| Dependent variable | The share of extended and multiple family households | | |
|--------------------|--|--|--------|
| Year | R ² | Significant independent variables | Effect |
| 1869 | 0.381 | Village | + |
| | | North-eastern region | + |
| | | South-western region | + |
| | | Northern region | + |
| 1970 | 0.496 | North-eastern hilly region | + |
| | | % of the population living in outskirts | - |
| | | % of those having at least 4 years secondary education | - |
| | | Population density (persons/km ²) | - |

While the analysis of census 1869 at the individual level (logistic regression analysis for the probability of living in extended and multiple family households) highlighted - besides spatial characteristics - the decisive role of occupation (landowners' much higher probability of living in more complex household types as compared to others) and of factors (age and sex of heads) which determined the cyclical changes of household structure, analysis at settlement level demonstrates the role of geographic situation and settlement type for 1869 and that of geographic situation, settlement type, population density and education for 1970. Living in more complex household forms was characteristic of rural population in certain regions in 1869 and of not highly educated rural population in 1970 in certain regions which were not densely inhabited and where the population did not live scattered in outskirts of the bigger settlements.

Data and methods

Data

• Population census, 1869, a nation-wide sample (the Hungarian MOSAIC sample, n = 31,406), data at individual and settlement level

• Population census, 1970, a sample at settlement level (n = 241)

• Population censuses, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2001, 2011, aggregate data at national level

Methods

• Descriptive statistics (aggregate data at national level)

• Multivariate linear regression analyses (aggregate data at settlement level) for the proportion of extended and multiple family households (1869 and 1970)

• Multivariate logistic regression analysis (individual data) for the probability of living in extended and multiple family households (1869)

Results 2: Changes by the household life-cycle

Figure 2 Household structure by the age of heads (males), Hungary, MOSAIC sample, 1869

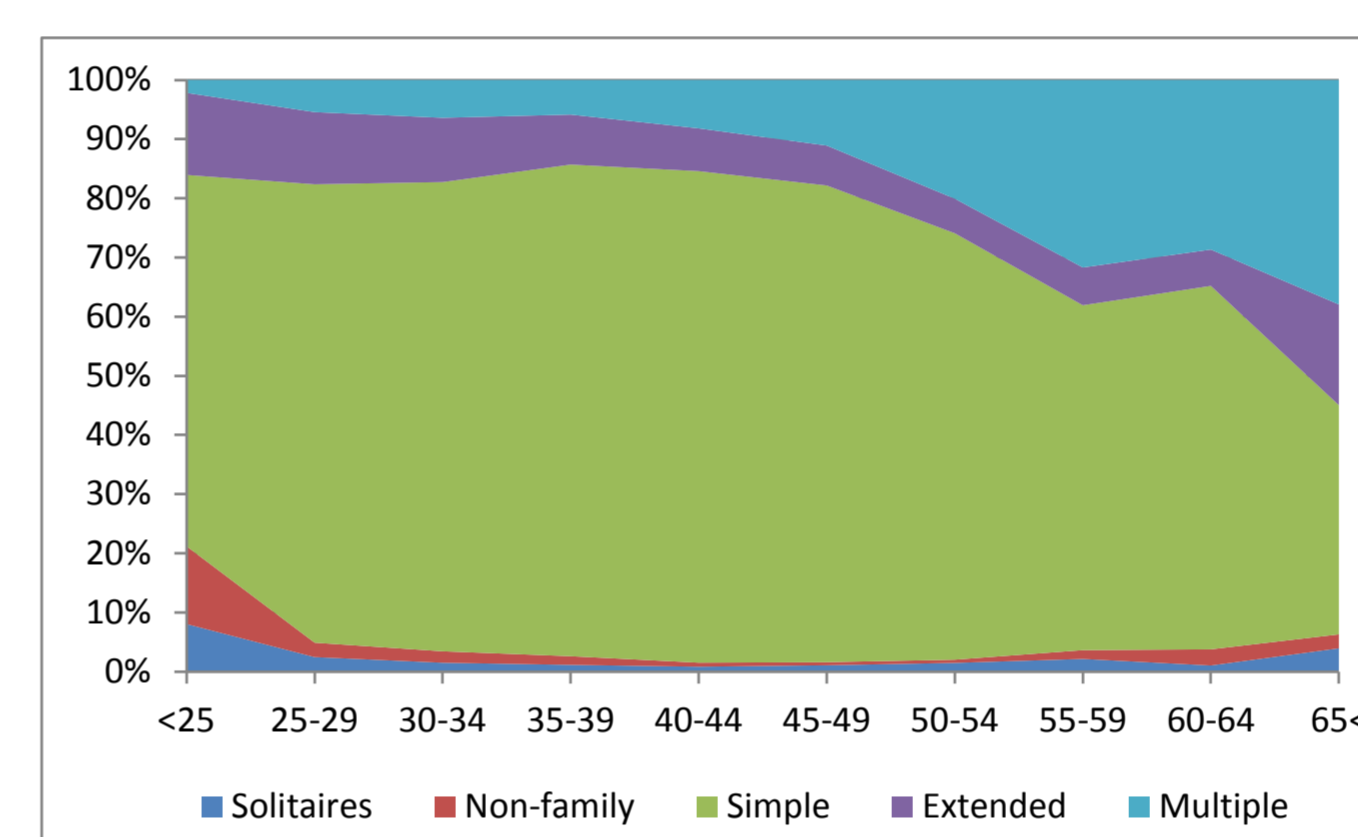


Figure 3 Household structure by the age of heads (females), Hungary, MOSAIC sample, 1869

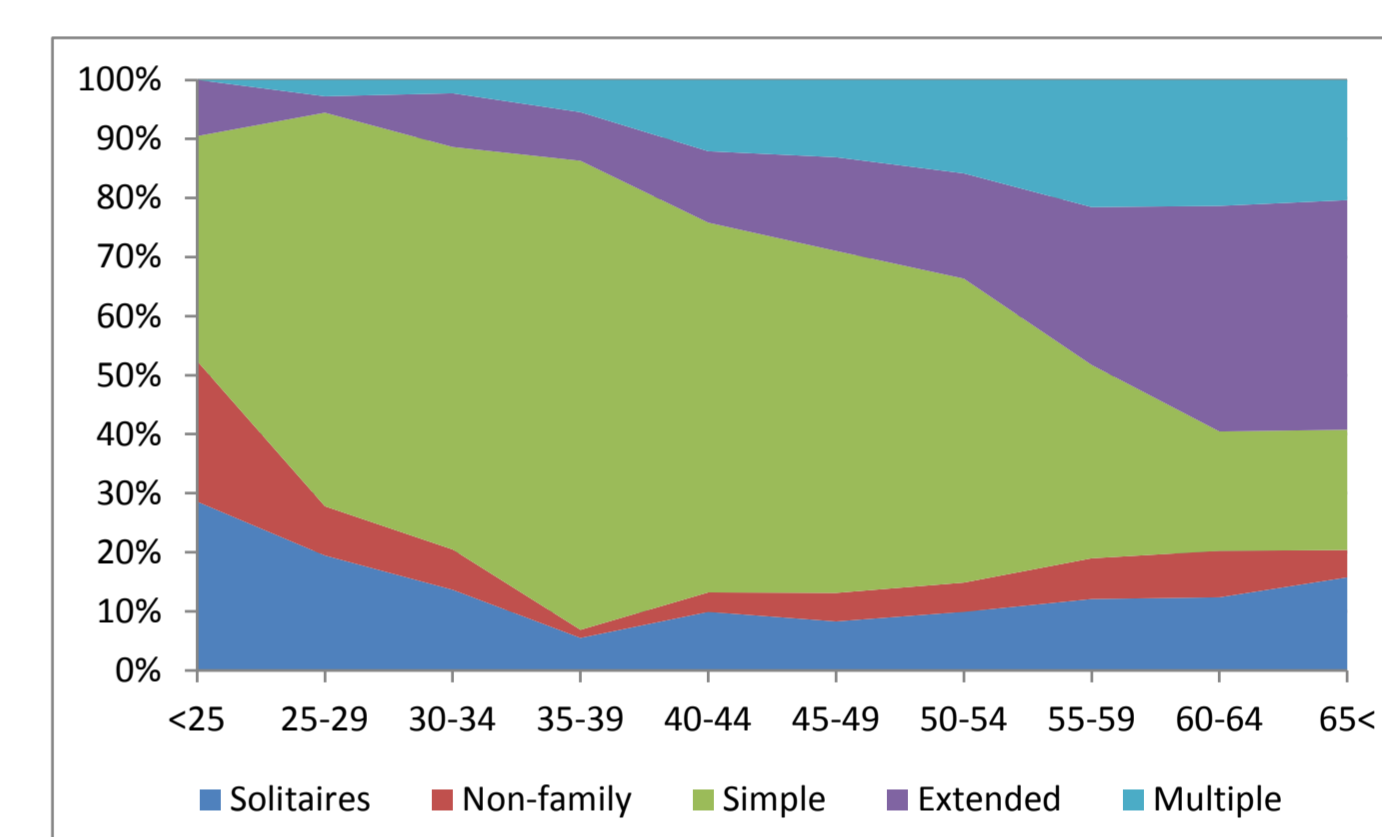


Figure 4 Household structure by the age of heads (males), Hungary, population census, 2011

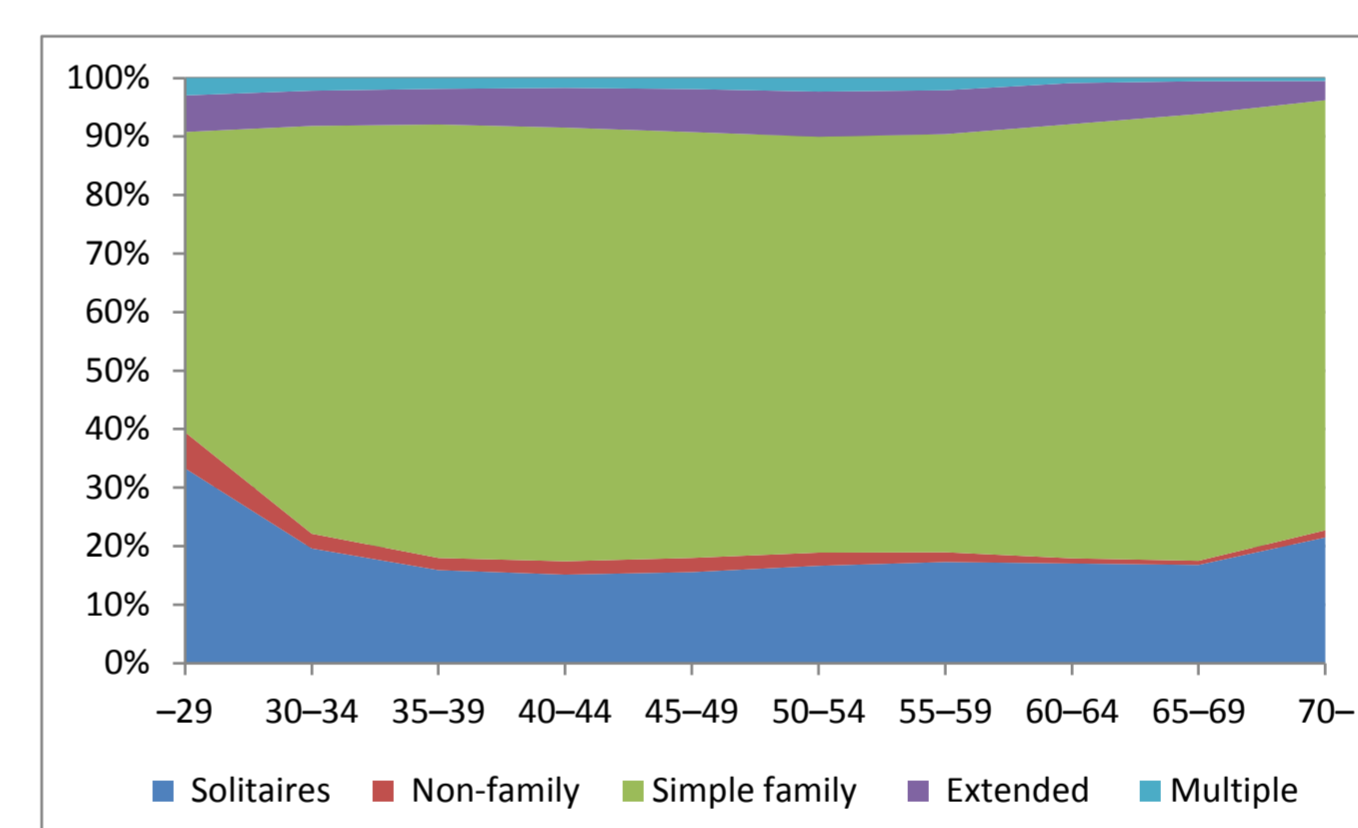
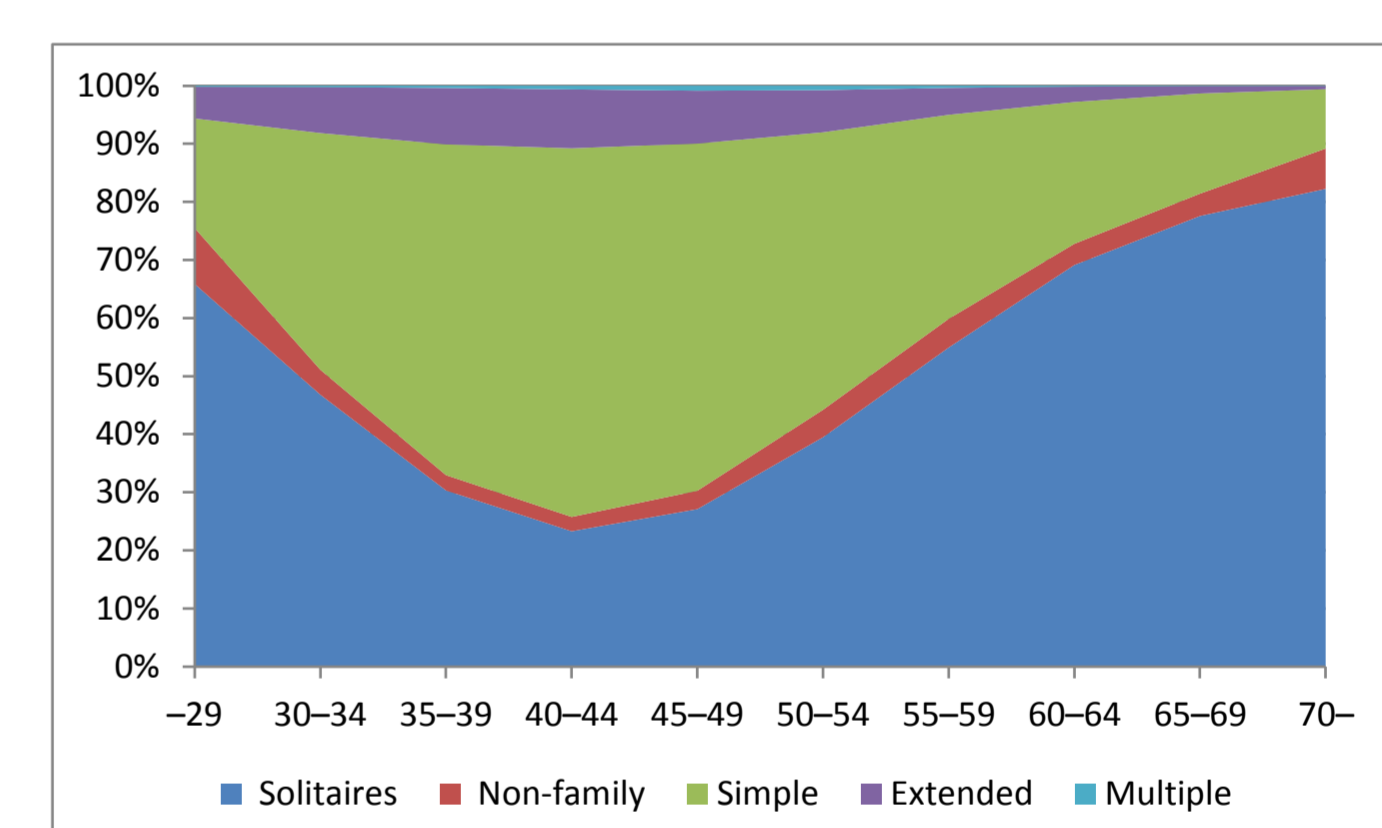


Figure 5 Household structure by the age of heads (females), Hungary, population census, 2011



The structure of households has also changed and varies by the household life-cycle. In the case of male household heads, living alone is characteristic of the younger and older age groups, just like in the 19th century. Living in households with two or more nuclear families has become insignificant, its role has been taken over by the one-person and multiple family households. In the case of female heads, the increasing share of complex form in older age groups disappeared and most of the older heads recently live alone. Living alone is also characteristic of the younger ages of female heads. Differences by the household life-cycle were and still are more pronounced in the case of households led by women. The structure of households led by men have become much more stable over the household life-cycle.

Conclusions

- In spite of considerable changes in the patterns of co-residence, both in the past and at present about 60–70 per cent of the households consists of one single nuclear family.
- The most important change was the considerable decrease in the share of complex household forms by the middle of the 20th century. Afterwards this former process continued and the change became more spectacular. At the same time, the proportion of one-person-families increased.
- Differences by the household life-cycle remained considerable. At the same time, the differences between households led by men and women also remained significant. Female heads much more frequently lived together with their relatives when they were old in the 19th century whereas now they are mostly lone household heads. The same is also true for males but to a much smaller extent.
- In the 19th century, besides the age and sex of household heads, occupation, landownership, land use, regional geographic conditions seem to have been important determinants of household complexity. Comparative analysis at settlement level emphasized the role of geographic situation and settlement type, which otherwise are not independent of each other. The existence of complex household forms seems to be a rural phenomenon, where the structure of the settlements might also influence the structure of co-resident groups. Scattered type of settlements on the Great Plain or among mountains did not favour to the co-residence of more nuclear families, moving out to hamlets and outskirts was always a possibility which might help dissolve multiple family households.
- To continue the analysis it is necessary to change the level of analysis by using individual data and to involve more variables possibly influencing household structure.

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