



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS N° 23

“HOW MANY CHILDREN DO YOU HAVE?”

INCONSISTENCIES IN THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS OF THE HUNGARIAN GENERATIONS AND GENDER SURVEY

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The reliability of the information collected concerning respondents' children is of crucial importance because it is the starting point of every study dealing with family formation and fertility. In the Hungarian Generations and Gender Survey the same respondents were interviewed four times between 2001 and 2012. In each wave respondents were asked about their own children living in the family home, those living elsewhere and those deceased. The aim of this study is to check if the reported number of children is consistent throughout the different waves.

Results show that there are significant inconsistencies in the reported number of children. Taking into account the 8104 respondents who participated in the four waves, we can see that nine per cent of the sample declared at least once a lower number of children than in a previous wave. The missing children are mainly associated with people older than 45. In each age group between 45 and 76 the reported number of children born in the second wave is

higher than in the third wave. The same result can be seen when comparing waves 2 and 4, for both men and women (Figure 1-2).

Omissions are usually a result of children leaving the parental home. Instead of being recorded as non-cohabiting children, they disappear from the database. Regression analysis suggests that men forget a child more often than women. Older respondents and people who have had three or more children are also more likely to forget a child. Educational level doesn't have a significant effect when other variables are controlled for.

The means by which questions are posed concerning the number of children is crucially important. In the Hungarian survey information was collected differently at each wave, which partly explains the different outcomes: in wave 2, information about children was collected with a life-course calendar and in the other waves no such technique was applied.

Figure 1-2. Mean number of children reported in the four waves according to age at the first wave

