

## 2.

### DIVORCE

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#### MAJOR FINDINGS

- The number of marriages dropped by half between 1980 and 2007, namely from 80,331 to 40,842. At the same time the number of divorces decreased to a much smaller degree, from 27,797 to 25,160.
- The total divorce rate which is an estimate of marriages ending in divorce steadily increased after 1990. In 2007 it was 0.45, which means that almost half of the marriages concluded in 2007 are likely to break up.
- The age of divorcees is also rising. In 2007 the average age of women at the time of divorce was 38 years and that of men was 41.
- The average duration of dissolved marriages is rising, too. In 2007 couples divorced after a marriage of 12.5 years on average.

The rate of divorces following a long period of marriage increases. Whereas in 2001 4.5 per cent of the marriages lasting 15 to 19 years ended in divorce, the respective rate was 5.5 per cent in 2004 and 6.5 per cent in 2007.

- In about 60 per cent of the dissolved families there are minor children. In 2007 one third of them had one child, one fifth of them had two, and seven per cent of them had three or more.
- The most frequently mentioned subjective cause of divorce among women is disaffection, followed by alcoholism, cheating, and a new relationship on the part of the partner. With the exception of alcoholism the first three causes are the same for men. Extreme workload is fourth in the row.
- Divorce is more frequent in the case of couples who got married very early, lived together prior to the marriage, have no children, and are not religious.
- Adult children of divorced parents marry earlier, more often cohabit with their future spouse prior to the marriage, and are more likely to divorce than those growing up in intact families.
- Thirty per cent of the adult Hungarian population consider marriage to be a life-long relationship that cannot be dissolved. Nearly three quarters of them agree with the necessity to dissolve unhappy marriages even if the couple has children.

## MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Divorce is the legal dissolution or annulment of marriage by a valid decision of a judge. However, the number of divorces does not give a full picture of dissolved marriages since several couples end their marriage merely by separation. Consequently the instability of marriages can be underestimated if judged exclusively by the number of divorces.

In the past decades partnership underwent a considerable change as to its varieties. Cohabitation became more and more frequent and the number of marriages decreased. A general description of union disruption deals both with marriages and cohabitations. The present article examines, however, the disruption only of marriages by divorce, mainly because there are no comprehensive statistical data for consensual unions. It is still worth mentioning that the duration of cohabitations is generally shorter than that of marriages and cohabiting couples have less children than married ones.

The past near three decades witnessed dramatic changes as regards marriage. In 1980 over 80,000 marriages were concluded but by 2007 this number decreased almost by half. Before the early 1990s the decrease was fairly fast, from then on its pace became slower and was at times wavering but the downward trend remained considerable.

The number of divorces was slowly increasing till 1987 and approached 30,000. In 1988 there was a sudden decrease and the number of dissolved marriages fell by 6000, primarily due to the changes in the rules of law. Family law was namely amended in 1986 and divorce suits were rendered more rigorous. Compulsory conciliatory proceed-

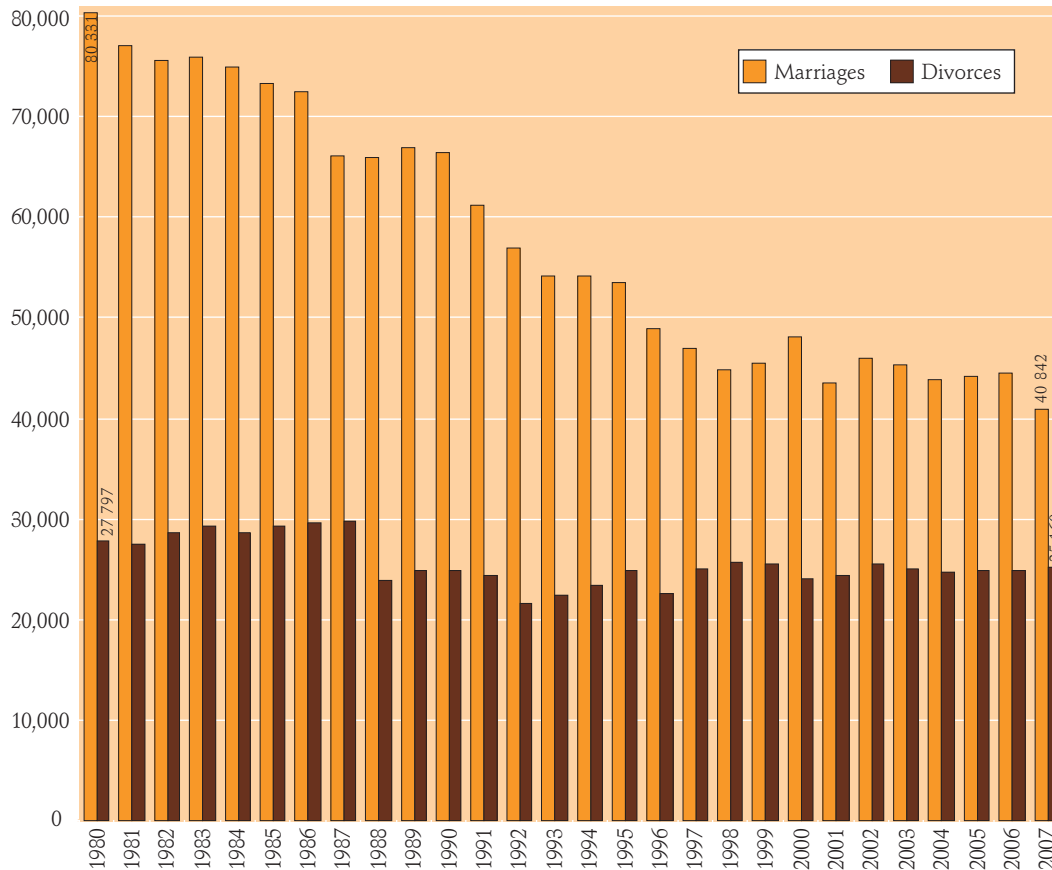
ings were introduced with the aim of preventing thoughtless divorces. At the same time the falling number of divorces could be attributed also to the fact that, hearing the rumours about the prospective legal changes, in the previous years several couples wanting to get divorced anyway sued for the dissolution of their marriage earlier than planned. But the number of divorces never reached the peak of 1987 again until 2007. It has to be taken into account, however, that the number of marriages fell, too (*Fig. 1*).

Between the late 1970s and 2007 more marriages were terminated each year either by divorce or by death than were concluded.

The frequency of divorce is measured by various rates. The total divorce rate takes into account both the number and the duration of marriages, eliminating by this the bias resulting from the changes of these factors year by year. This rate compares the number of divorces granted in a given calendar year to the number of marriages concluded in the same year, and on the basis of the divorce rate by the duration of the marriage it estimates the percentage of the marriages most probably ending in divorce. In 1990 this rate was 31 per cent but in 2007 it was already 45 per cent, which means that almost half of the couples end up before the divorce court. The rate of marriages ending in divorce almost steadily increased during the discussed period with small drops in 1992, 1996, and 2000. The rate did not change between 2002 and 2004, and rose again between 2005 and 2007 (*Fig. 2*).

Besides the growing social acceptance of divorce and its becoming easier as a legal procedure the growing rate can be attributed also to the fact that couples today expect their marriage to fulfil primarily their

Fig. 1. The number of marriages and divorces in 1980–2007



Source: KSH Demográfiai évkönyv for 2000–2007

emotional needs and are apt to break up once these needs are not fulfilled.

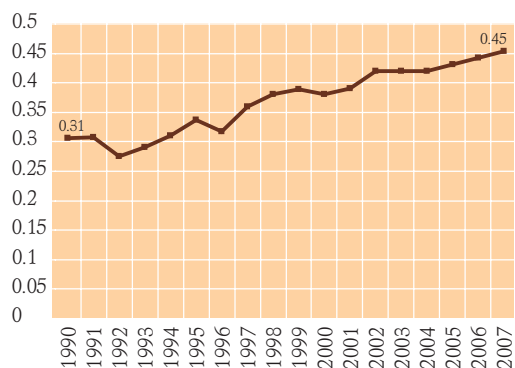
The total divorce rate is the best indicator of the frequency of divorce in international comparison (*Table 1*).

In Hungary the number of dissolved marriages was above the European average for a long period, but in recent years the divorce rate is more around the average. With a few exceptions, all countries witnessed a rising divorce rate between 1990 and 2004. Divorce is the most frequent in the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway), whereas it is

traditionally low in the southern countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria, and Cyprus) and in Poland.

The situation in East Central Europe is varied. The frequency and dynamics of divorces differs from country to country. The willingness to get divorced is low in Poland and Romania but whereas in Poland it was growing towards the end of the period, in Romania it remained on the same level. The total divorce rate of Slovakia is moderately high and shows an upward tendency. The divorce rate is high both in Hungary and the Czech Republic but whereas it was

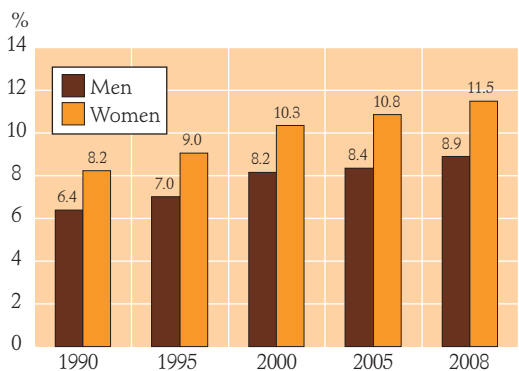
Fig. 2. Total divorce rate, 1990–2007



steadily rising in the former, it is increasing at an accelerating speed in the latter, from 41 to 49 per cent between 2000 and 2004. The disparity is caused by the differences in economic development, the different degree of religiosity, and the variances in the legal regulation of divorce.

The distribution of the population by marital status is determined most of all by the rate of marriages and divorces but it is influenced by the rate of those entering widowhood and that of remarriages, too. Between 1990 and 2008 the rate of divorcees in the population was steadily growing, that of divorced women always preceding that of divorced men (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. The rate of divorced persons within the total population by sex, 1990–2008



Source: KSH Demográfiai évkönyv for 2000–2007

Table 1. Total divorce rates in some European countries, 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2004

|                    | 1990        | 1995        | 2000        | 2004        |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Austria            | 0.33        | 0.38        | 0.43        | 0.46        |
| Belgium            | 0.31        | 0.55        | 0.45        | 0.56*       |
| Bulgaria           | 0.17        | 0.18        | 0.21        | 0.31        |
| Cyprus             | 0.07        | 0.15        | 0.21        | 0.24        |
| the Czech Republic | 0.38        | 0.38        | 0.41        | 0.49        |
| Denmark            | 0.44        | 0.41        | 0.45        | 0.47        |
| Estonia            | 0.46        | 0.66        | 0.47        | ND          |
| Finland            | 0.42        | 0.48        | 0.51        | 0.50        |
| France             | 0.32        | 0.36        | 0.38        | ND          |
| Germany            | 0.29        | 0.33        | 0.41        | 0.46        |
| Greece             | 0.12        | 0.15        | ND          | ND          |
| <b>Hungary</b>     | <b>0.31</b> | <b>0.34</b> | <b>0.38</b> | <b>0.42</b> |
| Italy              | 0.08        | 0.07        | 0.12**      | ND          |
| Latvia             | 0.44        | 0.35        | 0.34        | 0.36        |
| Lithuania          | ND          | 0.30        | 0.39        | 0.45        |
| Luxembourg         | 0.36        | 0.33        | 0.47        | 0.49        |
| The Netherlands    | 0.30        | 0.36        | 0.38        | 0.35        |
| Norway             | 0.43        | 0.45        | 0.45        | 0.49        |
| Poland             | 0.15        | 0.14        | 0.17        | 0.23        |
| Portugal           | 0.12        | 0.16        | 0.26        | 0.33        |
| Romania            | 0.19        | 0.20        | 0.19        | 0.21*       |
| Russia             | 0.40        | 0.50        | ND          | ND          |
| Spain              | 0.10        | 0.15        | ND          | ND          |
| Slovakia           | ND          | ND          | 0.27        | 0.33        |
| Slovenia           | 0.15        | 0.14        | 0.21        | 0.25        |
| Sweden             | 0.44        | 0.52        | 0.55        | 0.52        |
| United Kingdom     | 0.37        | 0.40        | ND          | ND          |

ND = no data available

\* = data from 2003, \*\* = data from 2001

Source: KSH Demográfiai évkönyv 2007, EUROSTAT

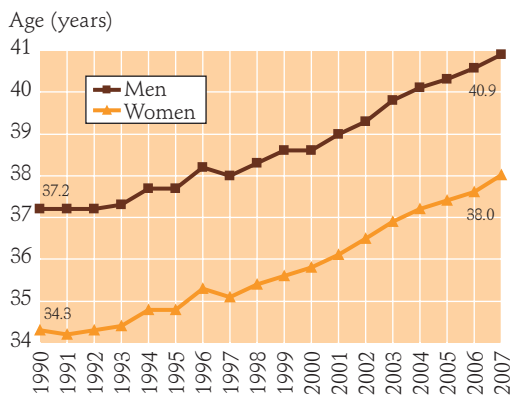
The rate of divorced men in the given period rose from 6.4 to 8.9 per cent, while that of divorced women rose from 8.2 to 11.5 per cent, so the rise is one and a half times as big in both cases. Divorced men remarry more frequently than divorced women. One of the causes of this phenomenon is that due to the higher mortality of

men in higher age groups there are more females than males. To be divorced does not necessarily mean that a person does not have a partner since divorced persons often prefer cohabitation to another marriage.

## DISSOLVED MARRIAGES

Following a stagnation between 1990 and 1993, the mean age of just divorced persons has been steadily increasing. From 2000 onwards the increase has been even more abrupt than before for both women and men (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Average age of divorced men and women at the time of divorce, 1990–2007



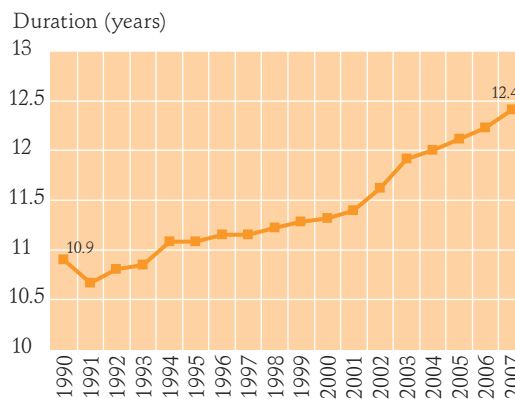
Source: KSH Demográfiai évkönyvek for 2000–2007

The average age of men at the time of divorce in the period in question rose from 37.2 to 40.9 years, while that of women from 34.3 to 38 years. The difference of age between divorced spouses remained almost constant, about three years. The process is almost identical with the rising age of those getting married with the exception that the latter rose faster before 2000 than the average age at divorce (see also Chapter 1). The rising age at divorce can be attrib-

uted to the fact that the number of divorces was growing among the middle-aged and the elderly, while it was decreasing among those under thirty.

With the exception of 1991, the average duration of dissolved marriages increased steadily in the period in question, from 10.9 years in 1990 to 12.3 years in 2007 (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Average duration of marriage at the time of divorce, 1990–2007



Source: KSH Demográfiai évkönyv for 2000–2007

The increase accelerated in the years 1991–1994, and 2001–2003, followed in each case by a moderate rise.

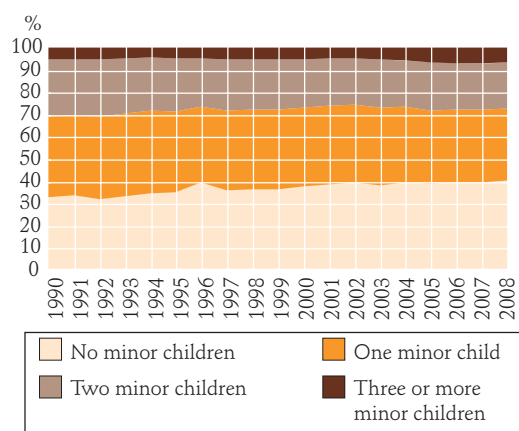
While the number of divorces wavered between 21,600 and 25,500 between 1990 and 1996 and remained somewhere between 24,000 and 25,000 each year from 1997 onwards, the rate of marriages dissolved within 20 years in a given calendar year rose from 27 to 38 per cent, and there was a rise also in the average duration of marriages at the time of divorce, too. The latter phenomenon followed from the fact that the rate of short marriages lasting no longer than five years was decreasing and later stagnating after 1997, while the rate of longer ones at the time of divorce almost steadily increased (Table 2).

Table 2. Percentage of marriages ended by divorce within 5, 10, 15, and 20 years, 1990–2007

| Calendar year | Duration of marriage (years) |      |       |       |
|---------------|------------------------------|------|-------|-------|
|               | 0–4                          | 5–9  | 10–14 | 15–19 |
| 1990          | 9.9                          | 8.0  | 5.4   | 3.7   |
| 1991          | 10.4                         | 8.1  | 5.1   | 3.6   |
| 1992          | 8.9                          | 7.5  | 4.8   | 3.3   |
| 1993          | 9.4                          | 8.0  | 5.0   | 3.5   |
| 1994          | 9.9                          | 8.4  | 5.4   | 3.8   |
| 1995          | 10.5                         | 9.5  | 5.8   | 4.2   |
| 1996          | 9.9                          | 8.7  | 5.4   | 3.5   |
| 1997          | 10.7                         | 10.2 | 6.4   | 4.3   |
| 1998          | 11.7                         | 10.5 | 6.6   | 4.4   |
| 1999          | 11.7                         | 11.0 | 6.8   | 4.5   |
| 2000          | 11.1                         | 10.6 | 6.8   | 4.2   |
| 2001          | 11.5                         | 10.9 | 7.1   | 4.5   |
| 2002          | 11.7                         | 11.6 | 7.6   | 5.0   |
| 2003          | 10.8                         | 11.4 | 8.1   | 5.4   |
| 2004          | 10.9                         | 11.2 | 8.2   | 5.5   |
| 2005          | 10.7                         | 11.6 | 8.7   | 5.8   |
| 2006          | 10.8                         | 11.8 | 8.7   | 6.1   |
| 2007          | 10.9                         | 11.9 | 8.9   | 6.5   |

Source: KSH Demográfiai évkönyv for 2000–2007

Fig. 6. Distribution of divorces by the number of common minor children, 1990–2008



Source: KSH Demográfiai évkönyvek for 2000–2007

The dissolution of a marriage bears down hard on the children born to the couple during the years spent together. Cases of divorce with minor children are specially important to examine. The rate of such divorces fell from 67 to 60 per cent between 1990 and 2008 (Fig. 6).

The rate of those with one minor child fell from 36 to 32 per cent and that of those with two minor children fell from 26 to 21 per cent. However, the percentage of those with three or more children rose slightly from 5.3 to 6.7 per cent.

The rising share of couples with no children at the time of divorce follows from the fact that the age at the birth of the first child is increasing, so several couples get divorced before the birth of their first child.

## CAUSES OF AND ATTITUDES CONCERNING DIVORCE

The causes leading to the dissolution of marriages are discussed here first from the point of view of the persons concerned then from a macro-level perspective taking into account demographic, economic and social aspects.

It is not easy to disclose the personal causes also because husbands and wives often view the dissolution of their marriages from different perspectives and attribute it to different causes.

In the 1980s most divorced women mentioned alcoholism as the main reason for the divorce. Its rate was conspicuously high among the causes. By the 1990s emotional problems and disaffection had preceded alcoholism and prevailed in 2000, too. Then came infidelity, a new relationship on the part of the partner, and financial problems. Violence in connection with alcoholism

Table 3. Important factors leading to divorce, 2001/2002

| What kind of role does it play in divorce                    | Rate of mentioning it as an important cause (per cent)* |      |      |      |
|--|---|------|------|------|
|  | Women   |      | Men  |      |
| lack of attention, lack of love                              | 38.1  | (1)  | 19.3 | (3)  |
| alcoholism of former spouse                                  | 36.0  | (2)  | 5.6  | (15) |
| infidelity of former spouse                                  | 34.8  | (3)  | 26.9 | (1)  |
| new relationship of former spouse                            | 31.7  | (4)  | 26.6 | (2)  |
| wastefulness of former spouse                                | 27.2  | (5)  | 12.7 | (8)  |
| financial problems   | 26.0  | (6)  | 13.6 | (6)  |
| personal habits, excentricities of former partner            | 24.1  | (7)  | 14.2 | (5)  |
| sexual problems  | 16.4  | (8)  | 12.7 | (9)  |
| physical violence  | 15.4  | (9)  | 1.8  | (21) |
| problems with friends or acquaintances of former spouse      | 13.4  | (10) | 10.2 | (10) |
| differences of opinion as to the way of bringing up children | 12.4  | (11) | 7.5  | (13) |
| problems with the family of former spouse                    | 12.3  | (12) | 13.2 | (7)  |
| division of labour within the family                         | 12.2  | (13) | 5.3  | (17) |
| extensive workload, extreme working hours of former spouse   | 11.9  | (14) | 8.5  | (12) |
| great difference of incomes                                  | 9.1   | (15) | 5.6  | (16) |
| extensive workload, extreme working hours of respondent      | 7.5   | (16) | 14.5 | (4)  |
| differences as regards the timing and number of children     | 6.0   | (17) | 6.0  | (14) |
| difficulties arising from building or reconstruction of home | 5.8   | (18) | 2.9  | (19) |
| differences in moral, religious and/or political issues      | 5.6   | (19) | 4.6  | (18) |
| new relationship on the part of the respondent               | 5.6   | (20) | 10.1 | (11) |
| differences in taste (e.g., inner decoration, clothing)      | 5.0   | (21) | 2.7  | (20) |

\*= The figures in brackets show order of frequency

Source: Családi együttélés című adatfelvétel a 2000-ben elváltak körében (Survey on family life among persons divorced in 2000) (KSH NKI, 2002/2003)

was specified as an important reason for the divorce by 15 per cent of the women (Table 3).

he factors mentioned by men as important in the dissolution of their marriage were far less numerous than the ones mentioned by women and the order of frequency was different, too. From their point of view the infidelity and the new relationship of the spouse featured as an important cause in most cases. The lack of attention and love came in third. With the exception of alcoholism the first four factors were therefore the same, which means that the fulfilment of emotional needs in

the marriage is important for men as well. The fourth most frequently mentioned reason of divorce for men was, however, their own extreme workload, which was far less important for women.

Besides personal reasons the demographic, social, and economic factors influencing divorce are similarly important to know. From among men and women aged 18 to 75<sup>1</sup> and interviewed in 2001 those individuals were more likely to get

<sup>1</sup> First wave of *Turning Points of the Life Course*, demographic panel survey. For more details see [dpa.demografia.hu](http://dpa.demografia.hu)



## THE IMPACT OF DIVORCE ON ADULT CHILDREN

The negative impact of divorce on children is extensively discussed in international literature, especially as regards the years immediately preceding and following divorce. However, children of divorced parents seem to be affected by the consequences of their parents' divorce all their lives.

In the early 1980s and 1990s there were surveys in Hungary in which adult children of divorced parents were asked mostly about their demographic behaviour and their relationship with their parents.

The results revealed that this group got married earlier and after a shorter acquaintance than others. They lived in cohabitation prior to their marriage to a much greater degree than the average, and brides coming from disrupted families were more often pregnant or had children already than the average. They usually started their sexual life earlier and had more partners, which led to a greater rate of abortions. Children of divorced parents leave the parental house earlier, primarily due to the fact that they establish partnerships at a younger age than those living in intact families. They are usually suspicious of the institution of marriage and live more often in cohabitation. The rate of the ever divorced is similarly higher among them. All these effects are still more frequent in the case of girls whose parents got divorced when they were 7 to 13 years old.

The emotional relationship with the parents are weaker in the case of the group in question, especially with the father, since it is mainly the father who no longer lives with the family after divorce.

Source: Kamarás (1997)

divorced from their first marriage whose parents were similarly divorced, who got married at a very young age, and who had lived in cohabitation with their future spouse prior to their marriage. The risk of divorce is higher also for those who have children born out of wedlock and for those without children. Religious people dissolve their marriage less frequently but there is a growing tendency to get divorced also among them as divorce gets increasingly accepted by the society. Divorce takes place most frequently in the first years of marriage and the risk diminishes after the seventh year spent in marriage.

Although the changing attitudes concerning marriage and divorce indicate the current state of public opinion, the various groups of society can differ greatly in their judgements.

In 2008 less than one third of the population considered marriage a life-long relationship. Nearly 45 per cent of those above 60 and 26-27 per cent of the younger generations. Seventy-one per cent supported the dissolution of unhappy marriages, with more women than men among them. Nearly 90 per cent of the population considered the presence of both parents necessary for raising a happy child (*Table 4*).

Public opinion was fairly uniform in this question irrespective of age and sex. Elderly people are traditionally pro-marriage but the dissolution of unhappy marriages is generally accepted. The idea is supported by more women than men in tune with the fact that nearly three quarters of all divorce proceedings are initiated by women.



Table 4. Agreement with the statements below by age-group and sex, 2008

|   | Men        | Women | –39  | 40–49 | 60–  | Total |
|---|------------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|
|   | (per cent) |       |      |       |      |       |
| Marriage is a life-long relationship that cannot be dissolved.                | 33.3       | 30.3  | 26.1 | 26.6  | 44.7 | 31.7  |
| It is better to dissolve an unhappy marriage even if the couple has children. | 67.8       | 74.0  | 70.2 | 73.2  | 69.9 | 71.2  |
| A child needs both parents to grow up happily.                                | 90.3       | 89.2  | 87.4 | 89.5  | 92.8 | 89.7  |

Source: *Turning Points of the Life Course, 3rd wave*. Demographic panel survey conducted by the Demographic Research Institute, 2008. (Authors' calculations)

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[http://www.demografia.hu/adat\\_valas.html](http://www.demografia.hu/adat_valas.html) - Questionnaire of the research programme *Családi együttélés* (Family life); sample and weighting; basic distributions  
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## FURTHER READING

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