

DEVELOPMENTS OF QUALITY OF LIFE
OF YOUNG HUNGARIANS
IN THE LAST TWO DECADES
PhD thesis

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Introduction

The process of growing up, the social criteria of being an adult person have significantly changed during the course of history. Adolescence, beginning with the sexual maturation, has been falling to earlier and earlier life periods due to the process of acceleration of maturation. Oral contraception that was introduced in the 1960s and had been rapidly gaining ground has freed sexual relationships from the constraints of unwanted pregnancy. The changing biological and social conditions altered the age threshold of sexual intercourse, influenced gender role expectations and role relationships, and gave to young people a greater decision-making power in the fields of marriage and parentage.

While the lower limits of puberty conform to the biological maturation, the upper limits are regulated by undertaking of certain social roles. The conditions of growing up and the life paths that are linked to them have changed due to the political and economic processes that are taking place in the post-industrial societies based on global capitalism. In the sequential model of life course that characterizes the industrial societies the timing of events in the life trajectory was chronologically fixed, the signifying events followed each other in regularity, and their order was irreversible.

On account of accomplishment of personal goals, career building, and the need of self-realization the age of the first marriage has been postponed, and the number of marriages has declined. New forms of partnerships have appeared and the proportion of those who prefer the single life style has been increasing. From the middle of the 1990s in Hungary, mothers give birth to their first child at an older age that gets closer to the age of 30 among women professionals. The willingness to raise children is decreasing which is reflected in the declining number of births.

Summing up the process shown above, in the period called in the demography literature as “the second demographical transition” the fertility and the stability of cohabiting partnerships is falling as a function of the individualization of the society. In the declining population the proportions of the aged as well as the immigrants to the European societies are also rising.

These processes have lead to the formation of a “new frame of mind”. The period that precedes the beginning of the adult life in the traditional sense cannot be simply considered as a postponed adolescence or a “delayed maturation”. The transition is not became merely elongated, and its specific stages not just lost their standard character, but the change has became indefinite and reversible. The condition of alternating dependence

and independence from the parents – caused either by the young person’s own decision, or the pressure produced by unemployment or a break-up of a relationship – is called in the literature the “yo-yo effect”. Members of this age group describe themselves as a youngster and as an adult at the same time; they feel they “grew up” from the adolescence yet they do not fulfill the criteria of the adulthood.

The socialization of the young people is based on choices, personal career, and self-fulfillment, and demands the development of new behavioral strategies.

Goals

In the center of my thesis, there are the members of a generation that is not frequently analyzed by medical sociology: the young adults, with special attention to the post-adolescents among them.

The reason of the relative inattention of this generation is partly because the young adult as an age category and post-adolescence as social position are rather new constructions of the process of social modernity; and partly because as young adults have relatively low risks of morbidity and mortality, the investigation of the health status and the health related quality of life remained outside of the attention of both medical sociology and public health.

The main objectives of my thesis:

1. The social adaptation of the young adult generations in historical periods (1988, 1995, 2002) of the past twenty years, along the following indicators:
 - Purpose in life; self-esteem
 - Cognitive schemas
 - Emotional orientations
 - Coping strategies
2. The analysis of the changes in health-related quality of life and psychological condition of young people through
 - Neurosis/anxiety,
 - Depression,
 - Suicidal behavior (ideation, attempts)
3. Analysis of the relationships between the indicators of adaptation and quality of life in the examined historical periods
4. Empirical analysis of the post-adolescent period of life based on a theoretical model that concentrates on the young people’s detachment from their parents

Hypotheses:

1. Indicators of social adaptation reflect on the changes in the social environment.
2. The development of the social adaptation influences the psychological condition.
3. The psychological condition of the young generations in the periods of social-political transition gets better.
4. Based on the empirical data, the theoretical model of the post-adolescence will apply to the young people in Hungary.

In the present thesis, I use the category of *young adults* in relation to the age of the persons involved in the analysis; the age groups of 18-31 are assigned to the category.

The concept of *post-adolescence* (later young age) is used in relation to the group of young adults who are in a particular stage of the process of becoming an adult but without gaining the full social status of adulthood. In legal terms, people reach the adult status at the age of 18 in Hungary. On the other hand, young people become detached from their parents, gain financial independence, and settle down to their own family at a much later age. By literature data, the period of post-adolescence may last until the late twenties, early thirties; this is the reason why my choice of the age limit fell on the year 31.

We can call *adults* “young people, who are in their legal age, manage their household in their own home, are financially independent, make important decisions concerning their life path without their parents’ interference, and accept themselves as grownups”¹.

The databases

The surveys called Hungarostudies give account of the advances in the health status of the population in every seven (or three) years (1995, 2002, 2005) starting from 1988. This enables the researchers to monitor regularly the most important public health problems and the key factors that influence them. These representative surveys contribute to the preparation of strategic health policy decision making as well as planning and evaluating prevention programs. The surveys provide reliable data for health professionals, health

¹ Vaskovics L. (2000): Social theory of post-adolescence. Szociológiai Szemle, No 4. p 9. In Hungarian.

care providers, and the population about the frequency of various health problems and the principal bio-psycho-social factors that affect their emergence, progress, and consequences. The surveys are valuable sources of information about health status and health- and illness-related behavior that no official sources can provide or are outside the health care domain, or the only way to obtain them is the direct inquiry from the population. Such information are, for instance, self-reports of health status and health-related quality of life or opinions about the health care provision.

The analyses presented in the thesis are based on the three Hungarostudy sub-samples of the young people aged 18-31 years. Specifically, 7287 persons in the 1988 survey, 3728 persons in the 1995 survey, and 2986 persons in the 2002 survey represented the young adult generations of Hungary.

Measurement tools

In epidemiological surveys, the standardized, reliable measurement devices that help the researchers to describe and analyze population characteristics play a key role because clinical studies do not give data in the required magnitude (for example coping strategies and potentials, mood problems, character- and temperament traits). In the present study, I used questionnaires and scales from Hungarostudies to describe the social adaptation mechanisms and health related quality of life of the young adult generations. For the comparative analysis, I chose devices that were used in all three cross-sectional surveys (1988, 1995, and 2002); from the 2002 survey, I relied on the tools that facilitated the analysis of my hypothesis about the phenomenon of post-adolescence.

Questionnaires applied:

1. Purpose in Life Scale
2. Disfunctional Attitude Scale
3. Hostility Questionnaire
4. Coping Questionnaire
5. Juhász Neurosis Rating Scale
6. Anxiety Scale
7. Beck Depression Scale
8. Social Support
9. Self-efficacy

Statistical methods

For the statistical analysis, I used the 15.0 version of the SPSS PC. Statistical Package (SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois, USA). I compared the categorical variables with Chi-square test or Fisher test. The continuous variables of normal distribution were compared with Student t-test. For investigating the relationship between the continuous and categorical variables, I performed analysis of variance. Latent variables were identified with factor analysis. I measured the strength of linear dependence between two variables with Pearson correlation; in case of multiple variables, I used linear and binary logistic regression models. In the latter cases, I chose the independent variables that influenced the dependent variable with backward stepwise logistic regression. The significance of the regression coefficients belonging to particular variables was characterized with the p value of the Wald test; I kept only the variables with $p < 0.10$ in the final model. In order to analyze the interrelationship between the factors in the final model and to exclude the occasional multicollinearity between the variables, I controlled the variance inflation factor (VIF) that was below 5 for each variable.

I invariably excluded the missing values from the analysis.

Results

Social adaptation

Purpose of life, self-esteem

In the year preceding the political transition, almost half (47%) of the young people still reported that “each day was novel and different”; their vast majority (95%) did not feel bored, had purposes in life (96%), and considered themselves as reliable persons (92%). After the transition, the proportion of those who regarded themselves as reliable and those who experienced their days new and different dramatically decreased. On the other hand, the proportion of those who stated that they had no purpose of life increased while the percentage of those who were bored had an exceptionally high value in 1995 but then resumed the value measured in 1988.

Cognitive schemes (Dysfunctional attitudes)

Three of these attitudes can we regard as juvenile ones since the majority of people between the ages of 18 and 31 considered them as typical to themselves. These are the following ones: great expectations in

respect of the social environment, feeling of omnipotence, and external-control. This raises the question that if in a non-clinical, general-population sample some characteristics are present in such a high proportion, can those characteristics be evaluated as abnormal or maladaptive. On the other hand, it is a well-known fact in the literature that external-control persons often feel helpless due to loss of influence on their own life. Their resulting passivity and lack of motivation predispose them to depression. At the same time, external-control persons and the persons feeling omnipotence had the lowest proportion in the sample while the indicators of depression (especially mild depression, and moderate depression in a lesser extent) increased in 1995. As a result of the findings I mentioned above, I analyzed the relationship between dysfunctional attitudes and depression in all three measurement periods.

The results of the regression models indicate that the dysfunctional attitudes with the strongest relation to depression (present in all three stages of the research) are the need for greater efficiency and the need for love, irrespective of social or economic conditions. We have observed a negative connection with omnipotence and external-control oriented attitudes, that is depression occurs less frequently with the appearance of these traits.

Emotional Orientation (Hostility)

The survey of 1988 precluding the political shift contained only one item in reference to orientation („People are generally mean and selfish and want to exploit one another.”). This statement of cynicism was more characteristic of young men (30%) than women (26%). During the two surveys cynicism has decreased in the case of both sexes, with a much larger rate in the case of males.

I based the evaluation of the five elements of the scale on the surveys of 1995 and 2002. Hostile orientation had decreased in all areas except one. Inter-family trust in 2002 had increased by 15-20%. Distrust towards the outside environment and towards people in general had also decreased. The most notable change occurred in the field of selfishness: others' success was less often regarded as one's own failure by successive generations. There was one element which showed substantial increase. In 2002, almost 40% of men (37,4%), and almost one third of women (32,9%) agreed with the statement: „Most people are honest because they fear exposure.”. Compared to the results of the 1995 survey, this shows an almost 7% and 3% increase respectively.

Coping strategies and skills

I carried out a factor analysis of the factor structure of the abridged Conflict resolution survey consisting of 14 items based on the joint databases of the three surveys². Analysis of the main component lead to the isolation of four dimensions with eigen values above one. The first factor reflects *a complex problem-oriented behaviour*, which includes the use of personal as well as external resources. The second factor comprised coping methods *implying action or incentive*, as well as behaviour implying *cognitive restructuring*. The third dimension contained items showing *easing of stress*. The elements of the fourth factor were various methods of *adaptation* to actual situations and problems, e.g.: willingness to compromise or efforts to reestablish emotional equilibrium.

Coping strategies of the various generations

The young adult generation characteristically tend to avoid stress relieving techniques to cope with problem situations. The most noteworthy change occurred in relation to adaptation strategies. While techniques mainly focused on analysis and positive action the years after the political changes in the country saw a shift towards techniques aimed at adaptation to conflict situations and actual problems in young people's behaviour. Target-oriented action, methodical action tended were overshadowed by compromise and positive approaches to the evaluation of different situations shifted to the forefront. In 1988 58% of young people indicated adaptive reaction strategies to problems, while seven years earlier this figure was above 60% (64%). By 2002 it had risen to almost 80% (79%).

Young people started using increasingly various methods of coping with different situations. The above mentioned restructuring were accompanied a significant increase in applied techniques. In the 1988 survey out of the 14 methods given, an average five was chosen and in 2002 this average increased to six.

Shortly after the political changes (in 1995) coping skills had improved significantly. The indicator's average value increased by about half a point. Men's coping skills were still significantly better than women's in 1988, but this discrepancy disappeared by the mid '90-s.

² I could evaluate 13140 cases based upon this database.

Quality of life (Mood disorders)

Neurotic symptoms, anxiety

In 1988 and 1995, emotional and behavioral disorders and bodily and latent disorders were measured with the scale devised by Juhász containing 10 items. In the survey of 2002 the researchers used the neurosis scale of the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HAS) to measure neurotic symptoms, which contained seven items. Unlike the Juhász scale, the HAS tries to estimate neurosis levels without questions referring to bodily symptoms, thereby decreasing the number of “false alarms” among organic patients, while also remaining sensitive to even medium level symptoms.

While the comparison of the two tests is impossible, the categorization of the population in terms of neurosis/anxiety is quite informative in relation to the changes of psychic problems. Less and less of the young adult generation are suffering from neurosis and/or anxiety symptoms. A significant increase can be seen in the number of individuals belonging to the normal domain. In 1988, more than half the women from age 18 to 31 (54%) suffered from neurotic symptoms to an extent exceeding the normal domain. By 1995, the temporary, mild and extreme cases combined dropped to 43%. By 2002 only one fourth (25%) of young women belonged to some group of anxiety patients. In the case of men, already in the first survey, only about one third (34%) could be grouped into a non-normal domain and this amount decreased in the later surveys by 8% and then 9%. While we can say that women are characteristically more prone to these symptoms, there has been significant improvement in their case as well. According to the 2002 results, the discrepancy between the sexes has been halved.

Inspecting each element of the neurosis survey by Juhász showed that dejection and anxiety caused by sleeping troubles became more common in the second survey compared to the first, while disorders relating to neurosis, latent symptoms and work-efficiency decreased and the quality of sleep had improved. Given that these latter factors were represented in the scale to a greater degree, the proportion of those included in the normal domain based on the combined values increased substantially.

Because the scale of the HAS test applied during the third survey is fundamentally different from the scales used in the first two survey, it can be assumed that the absence of the detection of bodily symptoms is the reason behind the decrease of the discrepancy between the sexes.

Depression

In the years examined, young people exhibited the highest degree of depression symptoms in 1995 (the number of cases considered mild and extreme had risen). These results are to be considered in relation to the fact that meanwhile, occurrences of abnormal degrees of neurosis/anxiety symptoms had decreased, despite the facts indicated by figures available in the scientific field, that a close, positive correlation exists between the two (neurosis and anxiety).

In search of the possible explanations behind these unusual results, I examined the relationship between neurosis and depression using a step-wise regression analysis. The four symptoms of the neurosis scale (difficulty in falling asleep, long-term mood shifts, unmotivated anxiety, chronic restlessness) explained almost one fourth ($R^2=0,21$) of the variance of the total value of depression. Among neurotic symptoms, anxiety, long-term mood shifts caused by depression, and difficulty in falling asleep increased substantially among the younger population, while other symptoms pointing to neurosis but with little or no bearing on depression, as for example stomach- and heart aches decreased. There have been allusions in other related research to the effect that non-psychiatric illnesses, the general state of mind and bodily symptoms or non-specific symptoms of depression e.g.: sleeping disorders, hypochondria and fatigue may also substantially increase the total value of the BDI scale. Bearing this fact in mind, I analyzed separately the frequency of all symptoms present in the 9-itemed scale in the respective years of the surveys.

In 1988 self-accusation (10,4%) and pessimism (7,4%) were most frequently marked by young people. Among the generations interviewed over the seven year intervals – besides the subjective, emotional symptoms (e.g.: dissatisfaction) – the bodily (latent) symptom which was most often indicated was fatigue (25,5%). After the turn of the millennium, the main causes of depression symptoms among people became fatigue and sleeping disorders, while the the number of socially reserved individuals increased. The symptoms of depression among young people underwent a considerable change over the years showing a shift towards non-specific symptoms.

These conclusions stand in the case of both sexes; gender variation is limited to the frequency of certain symptoms, as for example in connection with latent symptoms and self-evaluation. Sleeping disorders and extreme fatigue were characteristically indicated by women.

Suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide

According to data provided by our research, young people preoccupied with suicidal thoughts numbered the most in 1995. One fourth of the sample indicated having suicidal thoughts and there was no difference in this respect between the two sexes. The surveys conducted before the political changes and after the new millennium showed a lesser number in this respect. In 2002, a difference between the sexes became distinctly measurable. Between 1988 and 2002 the proportion of men with suicidal thoughts decreased drastically, and in the case of women, after the extreme rise in 1995 figures later dropped back to the level measured in '88. We only have data concernin attempted suicide from the last two surveys. In 1995, 4% of the young people between 18 and 31 indicated attempted suicide. Seven years later, this proportion was characteristic of women only; the proportion of men having attempted suiced dropped to half its earlier value (2,3%).

Post-adolescent period

In the present thesis, out of the various sociological approaches to the analysis of the different aspects of the post-adolescence period, I have chosen to use the model concentrating on the separation from the parents set up by Vaskovics, which presents a relevant theory within the scientific field. I will also attempt to examine the relationship between family ties and the process of maturation. I shall adopt as the basis of my theoretical framework Belsky's evolution paradigm, which points to the "benefit" of uncertain relational styles.

I shall base the above-mentioned theoretical assumptions upon empirical data provided by the Hungarostudy of 2002.

Vaskovics, in his model describes post-adolescent period using two separate approaches: (1) as the transitional state between childhood and adulthood and (2) as a special social position, not definable in terms of age and influenced to a great degree by the social structure. He treats entering into adulthood as a process of detachment, whose extremes are dependence and self-sufficiency.

Hypotheses

1. It is my assumption that the delay in entering into adult is characteristic also of Hungary, and is marked by an encreasing number of individuals of post-adolescente status among young adults.
2. The skewness of the self-sufficiency age "curve" shows significant variance in terms of gender and background.

3. Self-sufficiency, as one of the extremes of detachment is greatly determined by the quality of family ties.

The operationalization of the extremes of detachment, the composition of a new variable

Based on the extremes of Vaskovics's detachment model, I have established an empirical variable³ labeled *self-sufficiency* according to the following:

- Detachment from a common living space.
- Self-sufficiency and material independence.
- Detachment based on an independent decision
 - Sexual relationships
 - Childcare
- Self-consciousness, psychic maturity and self-efficiency.

In view of the collected data, it can be said that men and women exhibit significant differences in all considered areas of self-sufficiency. The smallest difference was discovered in the area of self-efficiency implying psychic maturity (5,7%), the most significant area being the investigating activity needed to estimate material independence (22,5%). In creating the variable labeled self-sufficiency I placed equal importance on all the different components. I added the value of the variable by one point if all criteria were met, so starting from zero, each individual could reach a maximum of five points. The degree of detachment under these parameters spanned from "total dependence" to "total self-sufficiency".

15% of the sample did not reach self-sufficiency before the proposed border-age of 31 in either of the five stages of detachment. "Total self-sufficiency" was reached by five percent of all young people, thus, around 80% could be described as partially detached.

In the case of both sexes, self-sufficiency shows a linear connection with age⁴. The skewness of the equations were practically identical, which is to say that a year's "aging" means an average 0,25 points of self-sufficiency growth in the case of men and an average 0,24 points in the case

³ I was able to evaluate 2734 individuals with regard to self-sufficiency. Individuals with incomplete personal data were left out, which meant that in effect only 92% of the given age group was taken into account.

⁴ Men: $Y = -4,330 + (0,252 * \text{age})$;
Women: $Y = -3,675 + (0,236 * \text{age})$

of women. The constant values show what degree of self-sufficiency would be like in year zero. In our case, we are more interested in the level of self-sufficiency from which men and women start off when entering the adult age limit. In view of the results of the extrapolation, the average self-sufficiency value for women is 0,57 and for men, 0,24. In other words, when reaching the legal threshold of adulthood, women have a greater degree of detachment than men.

Besides gender differences I also examined differences of background. I characterized background with the level of education of the parents, taking into account both the father and the mother. Apparently, the lower the level of education of the parents, the greater the young person's self-sufficiency value. In other words, detachment and self-sufficiency is achieved much faster in the case of families which could be said to have a lower social status than in the case of families with higher social status. With regard to the effect of background on detachment and self-sufficiency, albeit to a small degree, the mother's education level could be said to have a greater effect ($\beta=-0,127$) than that of the father ($\beta=-0,102$).

Next, I examined the relationships between family life, relation to the family and parents and the process leading to self-sufficiency characteristic of the post-adolescent lifestyle. I measured family integration with a series of variables, some of which refer to family structure and the composition of the family, while others refer to its functionality and subjective evaluation. The family's characteristic status is prone to change due to an increase or decrease of its members. A family with two parents may become a one parent unit owing to divorce or death. Remarriage often leads to so-called patchwork formation; the birth of a new child or the arrival of a new family member through marriage may increase the number of members belonging to a certain generation, while cohabiting with grandparents may result in a multi-, sometimes even four-generation unit. These structural characteristics play a major role in integration and family ties.

The data collected from the survey also made it possible to review losses (death of parents, divorce). I tried to grasp the injuring-protective nature of the family through the aspects of social support and inter-family abuse as well as through the evaluation of childhood and of family relatives. The two types of loss influenced the detachment process in two different ways. Individuals whose parents were divorced were less self-sufficient than those whose parents were still married at the time of the survey. The parent's death has an opposite effect: individuals who have lost their father or mother are more self-sufficient.

I used Pearson's correlative coefficient to examine the relationship between the five variables presenting further characteristics of family atmosphere, the number of siblings influencing the size of the family and self-sufficiency. Parental support and the goodwill of relatives is a significant factor, but is counterproductive in terms of self-sufficiency: the better the individual evaluates the potential support and trust arriving from the family, the more we can expect a delay in the detachment process. A higher number of siblings, which denotes a larger family lifestyle increases the chances for self-sufficiency.

Discussion

The generations of young adults from the end of the 1980-s to the dawn of the 21st century have grown up and socialized in radically differing social milieu. In the first period after the political changes, men characteristically evaluated their situation to be more distressing than women, self-evaluation of young people generally worsened, the proportion of individuals believing themselves to be trustworthy decreased dramatically. The self-image of young adult generation of the turn of the millennium matched that of the previous generation and by this time gender differences had disappeared, that is, women's self-evaluation conformed to the men's. In my opinion the strength of the unreliability factor can be traced to efforts at adapting to the unregulated and unpredictable environment presented by the new capitalism characteristic of the period. These should not necessarily be regarded as negative traits, because, for instance regarding the field of occupation, an early commitment to a given area has been shown to be no more beneficial than job-loyalty, epitomized in the preceding era by such phenomena as "old guard membership" or "loyalty bonus". Work psychology, assuming a close link between the development of a given area of work and personal development held – not so long ago even – that those changing their area of occupation lack sufficient adaptation skills, perseverance and trustworthiness. Contrarily, the latest researches in this area hold that the reatest evidence for proper adaptation skills is the ability to switch areas of occupation.

Trustworthiness as a feature frequently occurs with a negative connotation in the newly forming social value system, in connection with the question of advancement and success for example. Positions with real responsibilities are reserved for trustworthy individuals, and this was true not only in the old era but now in the present one as well. The "trustworthy" trait thus comes to refer to a kind of political commitment rather than to professional quality, which does not constitute a positive self-evaluational

character trait in the minds of individuals who turn away or refrain from participation in public life and politics.

The young people characteristically had external-control orientation. The generations encountered over the seven year intervals had a decreasing demand for performance and an accompanying perfectionist attitude. These cognitive patterns relating to the the perception of reality significantly influence young people's subjective quality of life.

The empirical data reaffirmed our assumption that the orientation characteristic of the majority of young people which can be identified as disfunctional attitudes (omnipotence, increased environmental expectations, external-control) do not present dangerous factors with regard to individual's general disposition, mood disorders and actual cases of depression, and therefore can not be deemed pathological or maladaptive. The danger of depression becomes threatening when young people can not meet the chalanges expressed as socially beneficial requirements such as an increased need for performance and perfectionism.

The succession of generations perceive less-and-less their environment to be hostile; cynicism and selfishness decreases as inter-family trust grows. Notwithstanding, the evaluation of the moral development of society becomes increasingly negative: in 2002, more than one third of men and almost one third of women held that honesty is based on fear of exposure. Another plausible assumption available to the sociologist is that the growing degree of identification with the above statement is an expression of the state of social anomy. This assumption is supported by the fact that suppositions pointing to estrangement and anomy have become increasingly widespread among young people. For example more and more have come to identify with the statement: "Some rules have to be broken in order to advance in life." This is an expression of the instability of social values, which causes uncertainty in orientation.

The weakening of negative orientation appears to have also had a positive effect on the efficiency of coping with stress. Skills in this field have improved significantly; coping potential has expanded. Stress-reduction techniques are rarely use, nevetrtheless, the proportion of attempts at problem-oriented solutions is increasing. Adaptive solutions expressed by an increase in the willingness to compromise and positive situation evaluation are coming to the foreground. Adaptation indicates that the individual accepts the current situation without self-incrimination. The emergence of this coping strategy among the successive younger generations may be linked to the high proportion of external-control individuals in the given generations. Other previous Hungarian studies have

also drawn attention to the connection between the two phenomena (coping strategies and external-control personalities).

The different forms requesting assistance (advice from a friend, relative, or praying) among young people have become embedded in the factors of situation analysis and evaluation. In the results of the 1988 Hungarostudy, the first survey to examine the coping patterns of the Hungarian adult population, *requesting assistance* and *searching for support* comprised two separate factors. In the later surveys, *praying* was grouped with the factor labeled *passivity* and *helplessness*, while *requesting assistance from a friend or relative* was grouped with *situation analysis* and *evaluation*, as was the case with the results of the combined youth sample. Gender differences concerning coping skills leveled off as women fell in line with men.

Despite the negative changes in personal goals, general outlook on life and self-evaluation, young persons' coping skills improved, their negative stance to the world at large weakened and a degree of laxity was observable relating to excessive expectations directed at the environment. Assuming these processes to be contributors to young people's health related quality of life – expressed by such indicators of psychic instability as neurosis, anxiety, depression, and suicidal tendencies – I came to the following conclusions. Less and less young people are suffering from some form of neuritic and/or anxiety symptoms. Among the neurotic symptoms, dejection, restlessness and problems relating to falling asleep have increased, while anxiety, latent symptoms and disorders relating to work-efficiency have decreased and the quality of sleep has improved. It can be stated in general, that the depression symptoms of young people have undergone a significant restructuring process, entailing a shift towards non-specific symptoms, which I perceive to be the clear and tangible effect of the substantial changes in individuals' chronic stress and/or lifestyle.

The delayed maturation of postmodern society's youth has been empirically confirmed now also in the context of Hungary. The process of detachment and attainment of self-sufficiency, which are influenced by the socio-economical environment are discontinuous and do not reach completion in the first thirty years of the individual's life.

The intensity of the process towards self-sufficiency is not gender-specific. The "skewness" of the age-curves do not show any variance. A difference exists however regarding "entrance" self-sufficiency, in so far as women generally show a larger degree of self-sufficiency when reaching their 18th year than men. The process of detachment is greatly influenced by background and family ties. The higher the social status of a family and the stronger the ties, the greater the likeliness of delayed entrance into

adulthood. At the same time, unfavorable family conditions accelerate the detachment process.

Conclusions

The great questions arising in the period of entering adulthood concern social life, work and sexual selection. The answers given to such questions by a given generation vary according to culture and historic era; they faithfully reflect the political and economic changes at play in a given society. On the basis of the three cross-section examinations, we may assume that the social life of the generations of young adults from the end of the '80-s to the early years of the turn of the millennium is characterized by reserve, which manifests itself in degree of interest and participation in politics on the one hand and in slackened social and fraternal relations on the other.

In postmodern society, the world of labor can no longer be regarded as the most important area to influence social integration. We have found that labor-efficiency is losing its role as a definitive factor in social ascendancy among the examined population in much the same way as the rejection of the concept of striving for perfection is increasing on the part of young people.

We have evaluated the generations' answers to sexual selection indirectly, from the viewpoint of demographic behaviour. There is a delay in coming to strive for long-term relationships, creating a family and childbirth, while the beginning of sexual activity arrives earlier in life.

Besides the "answers" given to the vital questions concerning maturity, the indicators based on subjective self-evaluation have helped the researcher draw conclusions about the state and changes of health related quality of life of young people in the post-adolescent phase. A number of results arose that could not be confirmed or refuted with the use of empirical resources, but which nevertheless – because of their importance – compelled the researcher to contemplation, even speculation, which could only be accomplished with the support of previous knowledge drawn from the technical literature of social- and behavioural sciences as well as of psychology.

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