

**University of West Hungary
Faculty of Economics**

**THE HUNGARIAN CHILD PROTECTION IN THE LIGHT OF
CHANGES, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE PROFESSIONAL
CHILD PROTECTION PROVISION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE
21ST CENTURY**

Doctoral (PhD) Thesis

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**Sopron
2014**

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1. Objectives of the research, hypotheses

1.1. Justification of the topic

The author of this thesis grew up in child protection so it was obvious for him to choose Hungarian child protection as the topic of the dissertation and he thereby marks a research area in which he took part as a child in care for more than two decades (1982-2005). The author saw the changes at that time in child protection as a child in care however as the writer of this dissertation he wants to approach and examine the topic as an outsider intentionally. Therefore the personal impulse only appears on the choice of the topic and subjectivity will not come through the thesis.

1.2. Actuality and importance of the topic

The family is the most important base unit of the society, which contributes to the subsistence of it by giving birth to children and socializing them and ensures reproduction of the population. The frame of the family can provide healthy and harmonic development of the child the best as well as the empowerment of its physical, spiritual and moral accession, so it is undisputed that we consider family even nowadays as the primary stage of socialization and the role of the family is determinative in childhood development. Most of the families are able to fulfill their duties, a part of them, on the other hand, faces such inner and outer problems which force them to accept help from their closer or broader surroundings to be able to solve them or to deal with in order to ensure the proper development of the child. Not only difficulties within the family but also the problems of the society and economy influence the life of a family which converge and cause serious disturbances. Such problems are domestic violence, poverty, income differences, fitting work and having children, etc. (Cseh-Szombathy 1985, Cseh-Szombathy 1990, Halász–Lennert 1998, Kolosi et al. 2000, Teleki 2010, Resperger 2011). A general decline in child population can be observed throughout Europe, youngsters delay family formation, getting children extends, the growing number of divorces shows the instability of the family as well. (Pongrácz 2000, Pongrácz 2002, Spéder 2005, Hegedűs 2006, Magyar–Hegedűs 2006, Földházi 2009).

The rising and recognition of child protection problems as well as finding the possibilities of intervention were always in correlation of the given place, age, social establishment,

economic and cultural environment, where they developed (Domszky 2006). The state recognised early that it has to take responsibility for abandoned children in need of care; and to handle some types of problems organised community-based child protection measures are needed (Szöllösi 2003). With this recognition child protection in Hungary also got to a stage where it stepped out of the inner intimacy of the family and it became an institutionalized social function (Domszky 1994). In today's modern societies child protection systems work in the name of the public. Raising children is not the private issue of the families anymore but it became a public issue (Rácz 2009). The state can only intervene into the life of the family in case of a profound public issue or if the child is at risk, in the latter case it is obliged to intervene according to the current legislation in order to restore the correct operation of family functions. The aim of our operate child protection law is to set basic rules by which the rights of the child settled in the law can be vindicated through the synchronized work of state, local and social bodies in order to realize the harmonic development of a child within a family and to successfully complement the lack of parental care (Nyitrai 2008).

While today in Hungary the number of minors who are at risk is constantly decreasing – more than the number of minors at all – the rate of children put under protection grows continuously every year. With the decreasing number of minors at risk the number of families where endangered children live reduces as well, but the number of affected families is even so about 98 thousand annually. Declaration of endangerment or taking the child under protection shows that such steps in basic care are taken which try to prevent getting into professional child protection so raising the child within the family could be realized despite the difficulties. If base care and child protection measures bring no results in solving the problem the minor will get into the professional child protection system. In Hungary there are currently about 21.500 minors and young adults getting child protection care. Out of them 12.900 live at foster parents and about 8.200 minors live in children's homes. The data show the importance of the topic as well, since 11 out of every 100 children in Hungary count as endangered for some reason and 1 out of every 100 lives outside its family in the professional child protection system. In this thesis we would like to analyze today's child protection in Hungary with an emphasis on the statistic data of children living under professional child protection particularly those living in children's homes also beyond the situation in Hungary with an international extension.

1.3. Hypotheses of the dissertation

The phenomenon and concept of child protection cannot be examined in itself but it is necessary to view it as a complex system using different approaches. The theoretical establishing, literature processing and synthesising part of the thesis serves that purpose. The current situation of child protection is also to be reviewed according to the ideas and intents of the Child Protection Act of 1997 and also where child protection is right now given the time elapsed since then. The latter is examined through the analysis of child protection statistics.

The hypotheses of this paper are drawn as follows:

H1. The aim of measures made on the level of basic care (declaration of endangerment, taking the child under protection) are mainly for the purpose that raising the child within the family can be realized despite the difficulties. By the more accented role of basic care the role and importance of professional child protection will most likely decrease (number of children being in or getting into professional child protection).

H2. Family model type solutions coming into the prominence require the modification of the institution system providing professional child protection, which prefer foster care and accommodation in homes with smaller headcounts which aids the family-type forms of care more within professional child protection instead of traditional high headcount children's homes used earlier.

H3. Current processes in child protection are presumably not Hungarian specialties they are assumably formed by international trends. The answers of our neighbouring countries having similar history to us is also similar to children being raised outside their families.

2. Content and methods of research

The Child Protection Act of 1997 gets the establishment family of a model type care system and preventive solutions into the prominence. The initial element of the act is that a child can only be removed from the family if the circumstances endangering it cannot be abolished within the family. For children removed from their families for any reason such care must be provided which is closest to a family-type rearing (Resperger 2012b). In order to house children in a home-like manner the act lays huge emphasis on development of foster networks and in order to modernize children's home care it aims to establish a low

headcount children's home network and supports the change of high headcount children's homes to smaller ones providing a more family-like atmosphere. Within the confines of institutionalized rearing it tries to solve the care and rearing of children and youngsters, young adults being under child protection by diversifying the types of children's homes and by providing specialized attendance (KSH 2012).

We wanted to settle the (data) analysis frame and the research direction of the dissertation with the above mentioned introduction lines and according to that we mainly focused on the following areas during processing the statistic data from the collection of the National Statistical Data Collection Programme (OSAP) of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH):

- Children endangered and taken under protection, children getting under professional child protection,
- institutional (children's home) vs. foster care,
- examination of the data of home types within children's homes.

Because the Child Protection Act took effect in 1997 the new phrases and changes introduced by the act could earliest appear in 1998 so we consider that year first in our research and we only have analyzed data on the number of children taken under protection from that year on (Hodosán–Nyitrai 2010, Papházi–Szikulai 2008). On the analysis of the situation in Hungarian child protection we always review the state-wide situation first and afterwards we do a regional comparison as well. We tried to use the latest publicly available domestic and international statistics. We have to note that at the end of 2012 / at the beginning of 2013 when we started to do the data processing and analyzing part of the thesis the data from 2010 was the latest available but since then we have also used the data from 2011 (published in 2013) in several cases during the analysis.

Regarding the used method we chose to do secondary data processing and analysis (validation, summary, conclusions). We did a widescale literature processing (theoretic basis) with the aim to provide an adequate theoretic background for data analysis. We did basic calculations and made illustrative tables and figures to draw conclusions and show correlations behind the data. These aid the data processing according to its goal and proper interpretation of the data.

In order to get a more accurate image about the current status of child protection we also did a primary-type continuous colloquy and informal conversation as an addition and as a

prelude with child protection experts related to the topic besides the useful information gathered from professional literature.

Since 1988 the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) is responsible for domestic statistic data collection on professional child protection. Within the National Statistical Data Collection Programme (OSAP) KSH collects and processes data with its institutional statistic data supply questionnaires and publishes them annually in form of hand-out publications.

We made the international extension in English so professional terms and phrases used in international analyses can be found in their original context. To make the international comparison we used the TransMonEE database of UNICEF which is an international data collection spreading to several countries since 1992 and it contains 164 economic and social indicators grouped into 10 categories. Data is refreshed annually thanks to the collaboration of national statistical offices. Besides Hungary, we analyze child protection data of the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Romania (CEE-5) within the international extension between 2000-2010. Within the international extension - connected to the Hungarian status report - we would like to investigate the situation of children living outside their families

3. Results of the research

3.1. New and novel scientific results

The thesis is based on the all-round study of international professional literature which is completed by a statistical data processing and analysis about child protection as well as a persistent connection and colloquy with professionals working in child protection. We see the greatest asset of our summary table made as a result of the chapter widely surveying relevant professional literature in the fact that it synthetizes the most important aspects of the two main levels of child protection based on numerous earlier studies. This can be considered as a gap filler because we could not find it in this form at any author.

The literature-survey was made in the spirit of the idea that the phenomenon of child protection has to be viewed as a whole. As a result of that we make the following

statement. Child protection policy as specific social policy programme-group is a public policy in which child protection has the task to create all-round legal regulation of the protection of children within the given social, economic, political and cultural circumstances of the country as well as to establish and maintain an institution and welfare system according to legislation. The aim for all this is mainly to realize harmonic development of children in their families as well as to properly socialize children living outside their families with the help and cooperation of child protection professionals.

We consider it a result of the thesis that it not only describes the latest changes in child protection but by taking them into consideration it also reviews the complex system of child protection especially summarizing the roles of the state and local governments as well as public guardianships.

Another aim of the dissertation was to collect current phrase definitions in connection with child protection. The phrase collection we made can be considered as a result of the paper as well.

3.2. Thesis of the research

The statistic data analysis according to the Child Protection Act became realisable nowadays because the decade that passed since the introduction of the act lets us observe possible tendencies through the analysis of timeline data and to evaluate the current situation of child protection.

Regarding the set up hypotheses we state them based on an all-round investigation of domestic and international literature, research made by others, and the results of our own work.

T1. The number of endangered minors shrunk by 50% between 1998 and 2011 while the number and rate of children taken under protection continues to rise every year so they tried to solve problems on the level of basic care. Parallel to this *the number and rate of children getting into professional child protection which shows a strenghtening role of professional child protection.*

T2. *As an alternative to children's home care, foster care is coming into the prominence and – as data is proving it as well – children cared in foster parent networks are the majority, which is going to have priority in the years to come by housing children according to governmental intentions. Examining the past timespan children's home accommodation and home types became differentiated according to the needs of children (regular, special, particular). While earlier children were living in high headcount children's homes, today the rate of children housed in small headcount group homes rose to the double so nowadays most children are accommodated this way.*

T3. According to analysis made within the international extension we can state that in the last decade family-type substitute solutions came into the prominence in all studied countries. *Steps made towards deinstitutionalizing of children are clearly visible and such obvious political intentions as well, which aim towards child-friendly, family-model type solutions within the care of children living outside their families.*

4. Conclusions, proposals

Child protection statistics, complemented with other studies and research on the topic can add many useful information to provide information about the current situation of the child protection system and they can mark development directions for the future and furthermore they can give feedback through the analysis of data about how the current situation matches with the intentions of legislators and decision makers. Besides that the processing of all-round statistic data and the provided information cannot only give a reference to outsiders on the functioning of the system but also a feedback and verification for professionals in child protection about the things they face on a daily basis during work. The dissertation also tries to fit these aspects.

According to our analysis done and given the timeframe of the years between 1998 and 2011 we can state that besides the decreasing tendency of endangered minors the number and rate of children taken under protection is increasing annually, so they tried to solve problems on the level of basic care. Parallel to this the number and rate of children getting into professional child protection which shows a strengthening role of professional child protection.

In the average of the given timespan the number of children getting under professional child protection was about 8 thousand every year; however it rose from 7.480 in 1998 to 9.757 in 2011. Comparing the annual number of children getting under professional child protection to minors taken into child protection we can see that the rate shows a growing tendency: the rate indicator of children getting under professional child protection was 38,3%, in 1998 and 53,4% in 2011.

Today in Hungary 11 out of every 100 children count as endangered for some reason. The rate of endangerment (the number of minors at risk compared to the number of minors in total) decreased in the first half of the analysed period, and in the last few years it stagnates about 11% of the continuously shrinking number of the minor population. The decreasing number of endangered children can refer to the moderation of the problem however from another point of view it also can indicate the results of child welfare services because one main purpose of their special personal social service is the prevention and ending of child endangerment.

In the case of taking the child under protection the rising number of cases can refer to growing sensitivity in connection with the problem, as well as to preventive functions and on the other hand it also raises attention on the fact that more and more children are living under disadvantageous circumstances and there are more and more families in the need of intervention. Data show the same because while there were only 6 thousand families with minors taken under child protection, by 2010 this number was 12 thousand (with a continuous growth), which means that it doubled in one decade.

The things mentioned above confirm as well that to be able to solve child protection issues one has to think systematically and client centric and maybe there is a need to have a stronger collaboration between the two levels of basic and professional care in order to shrink the number of children taken under professional child protection as much as possible. To achieve this the preventive character of child protection interventions has to be strengthened in order to be able to prevent the development of problematic cases in time. In this field of work all members of the detection and alarm system will have a great role in the future as well, who get in touch first with the child or its family in case of a problem.

Nowadays every second child under care is housed in family model type group homes or a children's home group of 12 instead of traditional children's homes (with a headcount of 12 to 40) in Hungary. Inside institutional care the advantage of smaller headcount group

homes is that it is much more child centric, it provides more opportunities to establish personal connections and to learn practical skills and social situations thereby aiding to become a healthier adult. It prepares youngsters more effectively for self-dependent life, and it provides a much more family-like example than a high headcount children's home. The abovementioned reasons give a feedback on the intention of legislators on modifying the professional child protection towards a family model-type character as well as to fit the needs of children cared for. According to this the types of homes changed based on their main function. Half of the regular children's home places disappeared which were mainly substituted by group home accommodation. Although these places got differentiated as well because group and children's homes for children with special and particular needs appeared as well as new forms of after-care accommodation (after-care group home, outsider accommodation).

Just like in the past, financial applications for modernization and renovation of children's homes and group homes need to be taken hold of so the circumstances of children cared for can be improved.

According to the opinion of child protection professionals a favourable development direction can be the differentiation of accommodation, especially because based on the observations, the number of children with special and/or particular needs is increasing, for whom the care system could not really prepare yet. The number of such accommodation has to get higher in order to be able to care for them properly. Institutions providing professional child protection can only be „competitive” if the numbers of accommodation are always in accordance with the needs and interests of the children cared for and the system is able to adapt quickly to social changes and professionals are properly prepared for the care of children with different needs. All this requires besides the differentiation of accommodation (in children's homes and foster parent networks alike) also its rationalization and optimalization. Only a properly established, locally (regionally) balanced supply system is able to fulfill these needs. Although the realization of this is far beyond the limits of this thesis.

We favour the fact that as an alternative of children's home accommodation the family type allocation at foster parents came into the prominence in Hungary as well, and most of the children cared for get such an attendance within professional child protection. An advantage of foster parent care is that it does not do the socialization duties in an artificial

environment, it transmits behaviour norms in natural surroundings, social connection form spontaneously, and the values of the child are determined by the family. Because of this foster parent care can aid social adaption more effectively, a foster parent is more effective in socialization than a children's home. Vocated foster parents who do their duties correctly undertake a very important and useful activity for society by providing the balanced development of the child accommodated by them within a family. This is the reason for us to favour current governmental intentions which put all foster parents under unified foster employment legislation and the state gives a guaranty of waging foster parents besides maximizing the number of children accommodated by foster parents. The priority of foster families is going to be ensured in the future as well within professional child protection as well as in the accommodation of children under twelve years already under protection. We can agree with the development of foster parent networks. Our analysis done also proves the steps made towards the improvement based on the advantages of foster family care to legislators. This also means a great challenge because several hundred new foster parents have to be trained and employed who are able to fulfill their duties successfully in the next three years. The legal conditions of this were created with the modification of the Child Protection Act in 2013, but the bigger part of the substantive work is still to be done. In order to provide accommodation in foster families for as many children as possible foster parent work has to be further propagated, adequate information has to be given, and continuous recruitment and education of foster parents is needed.

The findings of this analysis reveal that residential care is decreasing; the alternative family-based care is expanding in the analyzed CEE-countries. Within the formal care there is a tendency to place children into foster families. Foster care is a viable alternative to institutionalization. At the same time, it is very important that basic supply (child welfare and family support services) and also different forms of state subsidies (especially cash grants to families with infants to cover household costs and also to support endangered families with social services) are to be provided for families, which can prevent an unwarranted removal of children from their families.

Regarding research directions in the future the analysis made in this paper could be broadened to a county level besides describing state-wide and regional situations in order to be able to highlight specificities or differences already present. Furthermore, other

aspects (inner functioning characteristics of children's homes, school results and work positions of children cared for) should be considered during the analysis and surveys and questionnaires should be done in connection with this. Within the limits of this dissertation we only analysed the statistic data strongly corresponding to the aims of the thesis but there are also other, for example criminological data (felonies), data of escapes, etc. between the timeline data of child protection statistics. It can be useful to spread the analysis already done in time also with the data of the 2010's in the future.

5. The publications of the author concerning the issue of the dissertation

5.1. Publication in English

1. RESPERGER R. (2013): Children in Formal Care between 2000 and 2010: Core Indicators of Child Protection in selected CEE-countries. *Gazdaság és Társadalom*, 5 (1) 65-81. p. ISSN 0865-7823
2. RESPERGER R. (2007): Defense of our children: The role of prevention in the reducing of children's endangerment. 381-386. p. In: LEHOCZKY L., KALMÁR L. (Szerk.): *microCAD 2007 International Scientific Conference 22-23 March 2007. Section O: Economic Challenges II*. Miskolc: UM ITTC, 507 p. ISBN 978-963-661-742-4 Ö; ISBN 978-963-661-756-1

5.2. Publications in Hungarian

3. RESPERGER R. (2013): Szociális védelmi funkciók, társadalmi juttatások. [259-272. p.] In: Tanulmányok. A gazdasági fejlődés fő hajtóerői Nemzetközi Tudományos Konferencia. Sopron, 2012. november 12. [CD:/docs/s03/resperger.pdf] ISBN 978-963-359-000-3
4. RESPERGER R. (2012): A hazai gyermekvédelmi szakellátás regionális helyzete a XXI. század első évtizedében. [319-339. p.] In: Tanulmánykötet. Tehetség és kreativitás a tudományban TALENTUM Nemzetközi Tudományos Konferencia. Sopron, 2012. május 22. [CD:/nyeme_talentum_II_KTK_tanulmany_kotet_FULL_A4.pdf] ISBN 978-963-9883-92-5
5. RESPERGER R. (2012): A gyermekvédelmi szakellátás Magyarországon: a családközeli elhelyezés helyzete. *E-conom*, 1 (2) 130-142. p. ISSN 2063-644X
6. RESPERGER R. (2011): Gyermekszegénységi mutatók. [1045-1061. p.] In: Tanulmánykötet. Változó környezet - Innovatív stratégiák Nemzetközi Tudományos Konferencia. Sopron, 2011. november 2. [CD:/docs/s15/resperger.pdf] ISBN:978-963-9883-87-1
7. RESPERGER R. (2011): A családok támogatása, munka és család összeegyeztetése, a pénzügyi támogatás főbb formái hazánkban. *Gazdaság és Társadalom*, 3 (3-4) 166-184. p. ISSN 0865-7823

8. RESPERGER R. (2010): Főbb családtámogatási ellátási formák hazánkban. [17 p.] In: Tanulmánykötet. Gazdaság és társadalom Nemzetközi Tudományos Konferencia. Sopron, 2009. november 3. [CD:/macro/paper_resperger_richard.pdf] ISBN 978-963-9871-30-4
9. RESPERGER R. (2008): A hazai állami gyermekvédelem létjogosultságáról: Történeti-társadalmi, közgazdasági vonatkozások. 269-274. p. In: LEHOCZKY L. (Szerk.): *microCAD 2008 International Stientific Conference 20-21 March 2008. Q szekció: Kihívások a gazdaságban II*. Miskolc: UM ITTC, 294 p. ISBN 978-963-661-812-4 Ö; 978-963-661-826-1

5.3. Other publications

10. RESPERGER R. (2013): A helyi szociális ellátórendszer. (Könyvismertetés). *Gazdaság és Társadalom*, 5 (2-3) 127-132. p. ISSN 0865-7823
11. RESPERGER R. (2013): A gyermekszegénység mérése, mutatói. (PhD szigorlati dolgozat, átdolgozott változat). Sopron: NymE KTK Doktori Iskola, 23 p.
12. RESPERGER R. (2011): (Reklám)fogyasztó gyermekek. [17 p.] Tanulmányok. Hitel, Világ, Stádium Nemzetközi Tudományos Konferencia. Sopron, 2010. november 3. [CD:/docs/social_processes1/Resperger_paper.pdf] ISBN 978-963-9883-73-4
13. RESPERGER R. (2008): From the Child Protection Policy in Hungary. (Konferencia előadás). 38. p. In: LEHOCZKY L., KALMÁR L. (Szerk.): *microCAD 2008 International Stientific Conference 20-21 March 2008, Programme*. Miskolc: UM ITTC, 46 p.
14. RESPERGER R. (2007): Gyermekeink védelme: a prevenció szerepe a kiskorúak anyagi veszélyeztettségének csökkentésében. (Konferencia előadás). 44. p. In: LEHOCZKY L., KALMÁR L. (Szerk.): *microCAD 2007 International Scientific Conference 22-23 March 2007, Programme*. Miskolc: UM ITTC, 60 p.

The full list of publications can be found online in the Repository of Hungarian Scientific Works (MTMT): <https://vm.mtmt.hu/search/slist.php?lang=0&AuthorID=10034510>

