

Marriage dissolution during and after socialist times – a comparison between Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary

Mihaela Hărăguș

“Babeș-Bolyai” University, Centre for Population Studies,
Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Introduction

Societies in Eastern Europe have undergone profound social, economical, cultural changes at the beginning of the 1990s, leading to massive transformations of family related behaviours. Fertility has dropped rapidly, as did marriage rates, important life events such as leaving parental home, marriage and childbearing have been postponed to older ages, alternative forms of living arrangements (consensual unions and childbearing outside marriage) gained much more popularity, and dissolution of unions increased. Romania has known all these transformations, but to a lesser extent a divorce upsurge. Despite the freedom gained in all spheres of life, including legislative relaxation regarding divorce, despite behavioural and ideational changes on many social dimensions, divorce in Romania has been, 20 years after the societal transformation, at the same level as during socialism. All indicators of divorce show a rather constant trend in Romania, while a clear ascending trend is noted for other (neighbouring) ex-socialist countries, such as Hungary or Bulgaria. This puzzling fact entitle our investigation of an under-studied phenomenon, comparing two different periods of time, characterized by different socio-economic, legal, cultural, ideational contexts. Evolution of divorce in Romania has been insufficiently investigated, and mainly in a cross-sectional perspective. With the help of retrospective data of the Generations and Gender Surveys, conducted in more European countries in the first half of the 2000s, we are able to have a look at divorce during and after socialist times, from a life course perspective. We compare Romania with two neighbouring countries, Bulgaria and Hungary, which shared a similar background associated with socialist regimes, although they have different cultural and social history, as well as different socio-economic transitions to democracy and market economy.

Theoretical considerations

Researchers that approached family related behaviours in former socialist countries found that social status is an important variable in the process of diffusion of new behaviours. Marriage and fertility postponement or voluntary childlessness were initiated by higher educated women, like in other European countries, while other behaviours, such as cohabitation and non-marital childbearing were heralded by lower educated persons (Sobotka 2008). We assume that social status played an important role in the spread of divorce, too.

The most prominent discussion about social status and divorce comes from Goode (1962, 1970, 1993): he argued that a positive relation between social status and divorce exists in a society where there are high legal, social and economic barriers to divorce, and, as these barriers gradually fade, so does the mentioned positive relation and divorce becomes more common in lower classes. One of the proxies for social status is education and a direct implication of Goode's hypothesis would be a reversal in the educational gradient of divorce from positive to negative (De Graaf and Kalmijn 2006, Härkönen and Dronkers 2006, Salvini and Vignoli 2011, Matysiak et al. 2011), during the transition from the totalitarian regime to democracy and market economy.

We test Goode's hypothesis in the three former socialist countries, given the important societal changes that came with the demise of the socialist regime. We use several covariates as proxies for social status: educational status (at marriage), father's social status, residence during childhood (urban vs. rural). We expect to found a positive association of social status and marriage dissolution during socialism, and a weakening of this relation afterwards. We expect that

the positive gradient to be strongest for socialist time Romania, where the divorce legislation was the most restrictive, compared with other two countries.

In our analysis we control for other predictors of divorce that are documented in the literature, such as age at marriage, the number of children, parental divorce, type of marriage (direct or after cohabitation).

Data and Method

We focus only on women and we study the risk of first divorce, so our study sample consists of first time married women. We construct piecewise constant exponential event history models, where the baseline hazard is the time elapsed since entry into first marriage until divorce (duration of marriage, in months). Cases are censored at interview (if the event has not taken place) or at the death of the spouse (if the marriage ended that way). The working samples are as follows:

Table 1. Sample size and number of events

	Women	Divorces
Romania	5150	464
Bulgaria	4889	410
Hungary	5793	1229

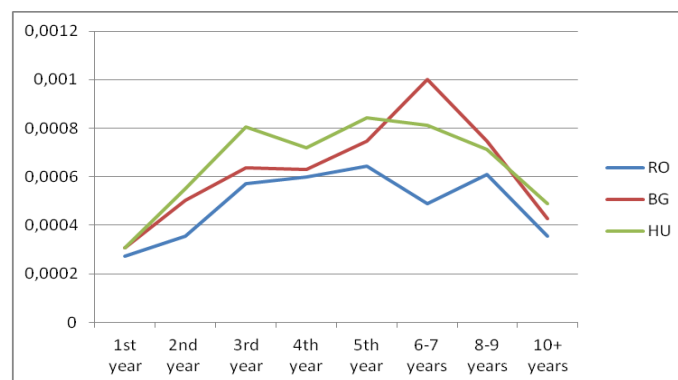
Source: Generations and Gender Surveys, author's calculations.

We use several *time constant covariates*: age group at marriage, educational status at marriage, father's occupation or education (accounting for the social status of family of origin), residence during childhood (urban vs. rural), parental divorce and type of marriage (direct or after cohabitation). The *time varying covariates* that we use are calendar period (before and after the change of the political regime) and parity.

Results

Divorce intensities are the lowest in Romania, at all marriage durations.

Figure 1. Hazard rates for the transition from marriage to divorce, by union duration. Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary



Source: Generations and Gender Surveys, author's calculations.

Note: controlled for calendar period, education status at marriage, father's occupation, residence during childhood, parental divorce, age at marriage, parity and type of marriage

From the multiplicative model (Table 2) we notice that women with lower social status show lower divorce risks, in all countries. Low educated women, whose fathers were workers or had a low education, or who lived in rural settlements during childhood are the least prone to dissolve their marriage. We then turn our attention to interaction models, in our attempt to see

whether the changes that took place during the 1990s had a different impact on women with different social statuses.

We see from Figure 2 that the positive educational gradient is visible in Romania and Bulgaria during socialism, but not in Hungary. After the change of the political regime, the positive educational gradient of divorce fades in Romania and it becomes negative in Bulgaria (significant higher divorce risks for low educated women). In Hungary, the situation looks very similar in both periods.

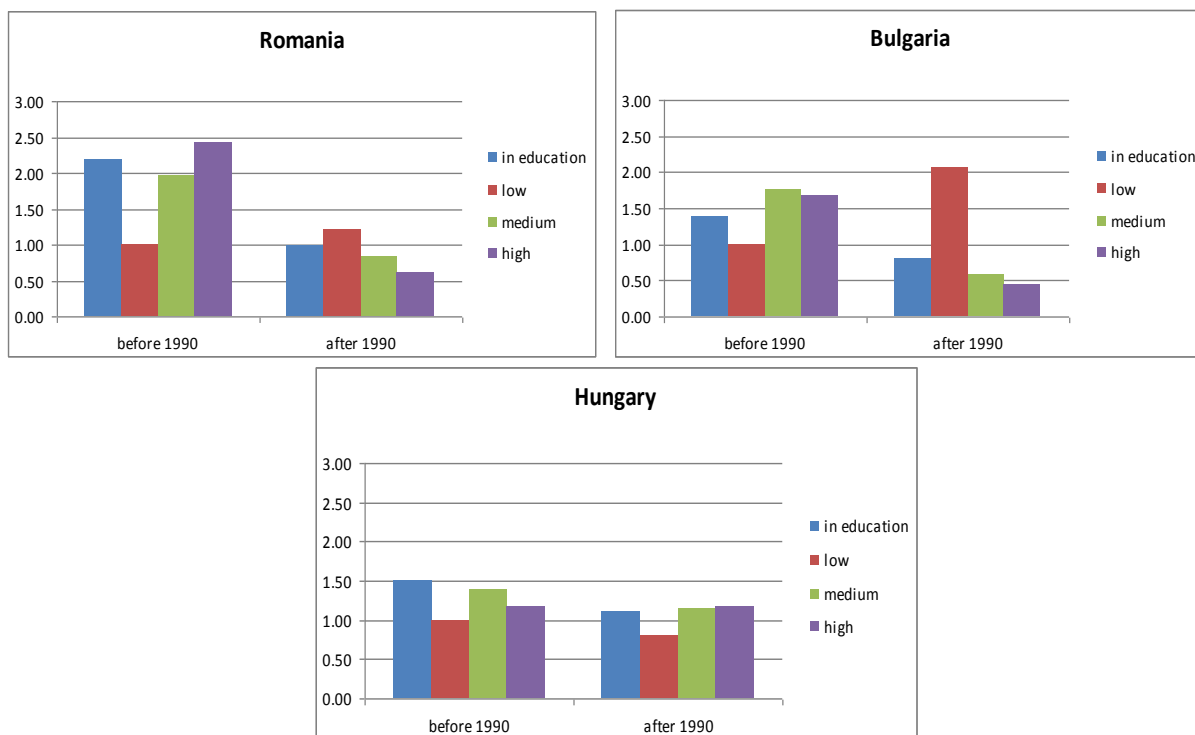
Table 2. Results of event history models for the transition from marriage to divorce, relative risks (multiplicative model)

		Romania	Bulgaria	Hungary
Calendar period	before 1990	1	1	1
	after 1990	1.09	1.42 ***	0.88 *
Educational status at marriage	in education	2.21 ***	1.28	1.55 ***
	below secondary	1	1	1
	secondary education	1.80 ***	1.34 *	1.44 ***
	tertiary education	1.90 ***	1.05	1.24
Father's occupation	unspecified	0.81	0.86	
	professionals	1	1.00	
	clerks/services	0.91	0.72	
	workers	0.56 ***	0.62 **	
	agriculture	0.81	0.92	
Father's education	unspecified			1.44 ***
	below secondary			1
	secondary education			1.48 ***
	tertiary education			1.96 ***
Residence during childhood	urban	1	1	
	rural	0.69 ***	0.51 ***	
	unknown		0.95	
Parental divorce	no parental divorce	1	1	1
	parental divorce	1.31	2.22 ***	1.53 ***
Age at marriage	before 20	1	1	1
	20-24	0.79 **	0.76 **	0.80 ***
	25-29	0.85	0.67 **	0.72 ***
	above 30	1.04	0.58 *	0.63 **
Parity	no children	1.39 ***	1.69 ***	1.60 ***
	1 child	1	1	1
	2 children	0.66 ***	0.44 ***	0.66 ***
	3 children or more	0.68 **	0.40 ***	0.73 ***
Type of marriage	direct marriage	1	1	1
	marriage after cohabitation	1.61 ***	0.80 **	2.42 ***
	marriage after multiple cohabitations	3.43 ***		1.72 **

Source: Generations and Gender Surveys, author's calculations.

Note: *** significant at 1% level; ** significant at 5% level; * significant at 10% level.

Figure 2. Relative risks of divorce, by education status at marriage and calendar period

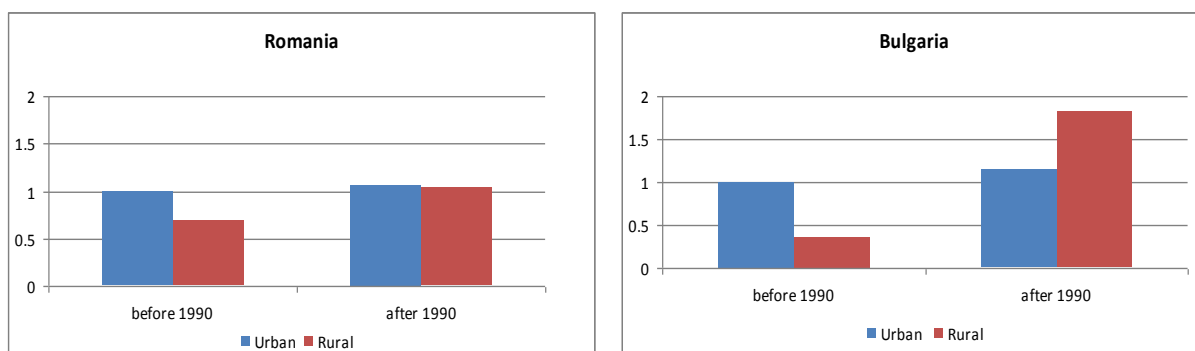


Source: Generations and Gender Surveys, author's calculations.

Note: controlled for marriage duration, father's occupation, residence during childhood, parental divorce, age at marriage, parity and type of marriage

We considered the type of residence during childhood an indicator of the socio-economic and educational resources of the family of origin, where rural residence is associated with fewer such resources and thus with a lower social status. Figure 3 shows that during socialism, women born and grown up in urban settlement had higher divorce risks than their rural counterparts, both in Romania and Bulgaria. After the change of political regime, these differences disappear in case of Romanian women and they inverse in case of Bulgarian women.

Figure 3. Relative risks of divorce, by residence during childhood and calendar period



Source: Generations and Gender Surveys, author's calculations.

Note: controlled for marriage duration, educational status at marriage, father's occupation, parental divorce, age at marriage, parity and type of marriage

We have found positive social gradients of divorce risks for Romania and Bulgaria during socialist times, but none for Hungary. In the post-socialist period, the link between social status and divorce risk loses its significance in Romania, while in Bulgaria an opposite relation emerge. The social gradient of divorce becomes negative here: low educated women, born and raised in rural settlements show the highest divorce risks.

Acknowledgements

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