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**Changes in Fertility and Childbearing Practices among poor
Gypsies in post 1989 North Hungary:
The use of Anthropology in Demography**

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Introduction (Table 1)

Fertility data reveals: After the Transformation (in 1989) the Reproduction rate of the Gypsy Population in Hungary has further decreased but is still much higher than that of the Total Hungarian Population. (Total Fertility Rate in Hungary has dropped from 1,86 in 1989 to the critical level of 1,33 in 2000). One of the explanations for fertility decline are the deteriorating economic conditions. But the same structural changes have not affected the different strata of the society the same way: **The fertility of the poorest and the least educated has increased since the Transformation.**

Table 1.

Changes in Fertility in Hungary (Total population) and in the Gypsy population of Hungary (Gypsies)

Number of live births per 1000 inhabitant (Crude birth rate)

Year	Gypsies ¹	Total population	Gypsies in Lapos ²	Gypsies in Rakaca
1971	32	15	27,3	33,2
1993	28,7	11,3	35,2	40,2
2002	25,3	9,7	34,8	35,1

¹ Source: Kemeny, Istvan-Janky, Bela: Gypsy survey in 2003. Nepesedesi, nyelvhasznalati es nemzetisegi adatok . Beszelo, 2003. oktober

² Calculated with estimated local population numbers for the Gypsies

The research sites (Figure 1, Tables 2-3)

Figure 1.
Map of Hungary with Edeleny district



Lapos is a small village in Northern Hungary, part of Edeleny district. Currently 75% of its population of 680 inhabitants are Gypsies. The local society is highly stratified, and the different classes live segregated. At the top of the hierarchy are the descendants of old (non-Gypsy) farmers. The majority of the local population is that of poor Gypsies who are on the edge of society.

Rakaca is the largest settlement in this area becoming a gypsy 'ghetto'. 90% of its population of almost 900 are Roma. More precisely, the local representatives regard 90% as Gypsy. At the same time, only 50% considered themselves as being of Gypsy descent at the last census

Table 2.
Population numbers in Lapos and Rakaca (1980-2004)

Year	Gypsy population (%)	Non-Gypsy population (%)	Total population (N)
LAPOS			
1980	60	40	603
1990	65	35	568
2001	70	30	656
2004	75	25	680
RAKACA			
1980	70	30	925
1990	80	20	719
2001	85	15	890
2004	90	10	880

Note: Gypsy ethnicity is not an ,objective, scientific fact‘. Gypsy or Roma ethnicity has a soft boundary, depending on time and situation. This research used the local ethnic ,assignment‘, considering those as being Gypsies who are called so by their local community on the basis of their alleged Gypsy descent.

Table 3. Some data on the social status of the studied population in Lapos and Rakaca by ethnicity (2004)

LAPOS		
Social status	Gypsies (N=85)	Non-Gypsies (N=32)
Monthly income per capita	83 USD	196.8 USD
	(Minimuage pension was 92 USD in Hungary in 2004)	
Mean length of unemployment of the head of the house (in years)	11.5	7.3
The percentage of unemployed fathers	97.5 %	10 %
The percentage of high school drop-out mothers	75 %	8%
RAKACA		
Social status	Gypsies (N=119)	Non-Gypsies (N=20)
Monthly income per capita	79.5 USD	143.9 USD
Mean length of unemployment of the househead (in years)	7.6	5.5
The percentage of unemployed fathers	89 %	5.5 %
The percentage of high school drop-out mothers	41 %	14%

Research Methodology

The author has benefited from several months of extensive fieldwork and survey data collected in the two “ghettoised, Gypsified” villages (Lapos and Rakaca). Being able to reconstruct the fertility carrier of the studied population for the last 30 years and in the search for the possible factors influencing their reproductive behaviour, we also used historical sources: we have worked with archival documents, that is birth, marriage, and death records, school records and carried out in-depth interviews with all the village dwellers aged 14 and above.

Fertility changes (1970-2004)
(Figures 2 – 4)

Figure 2.

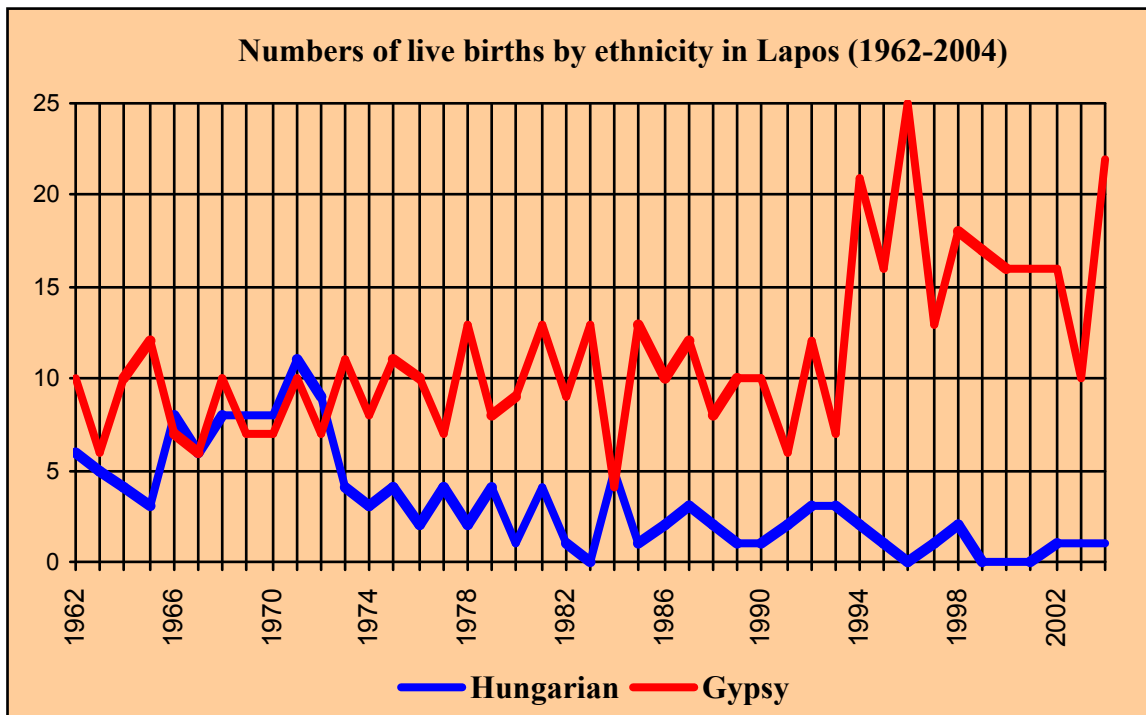


Figure 3.

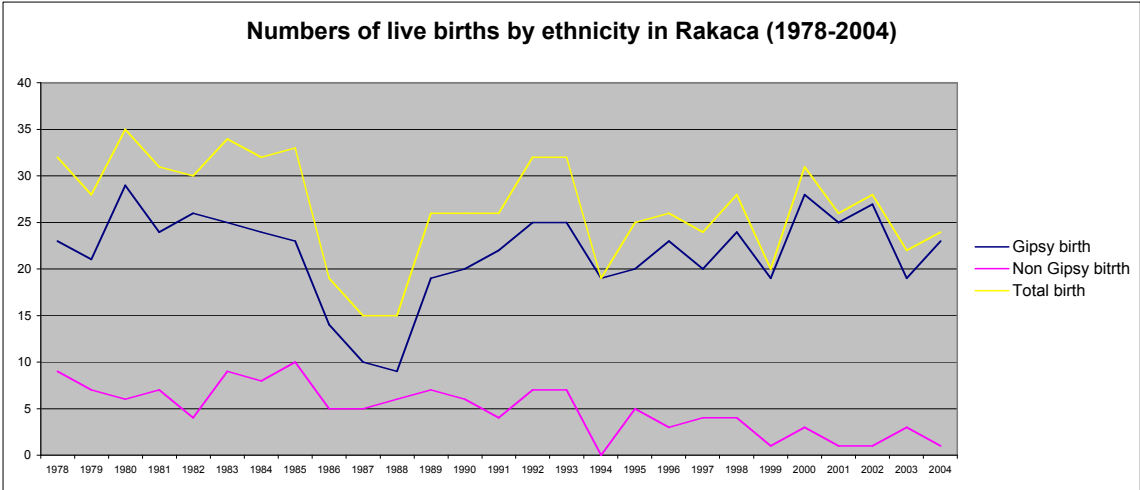
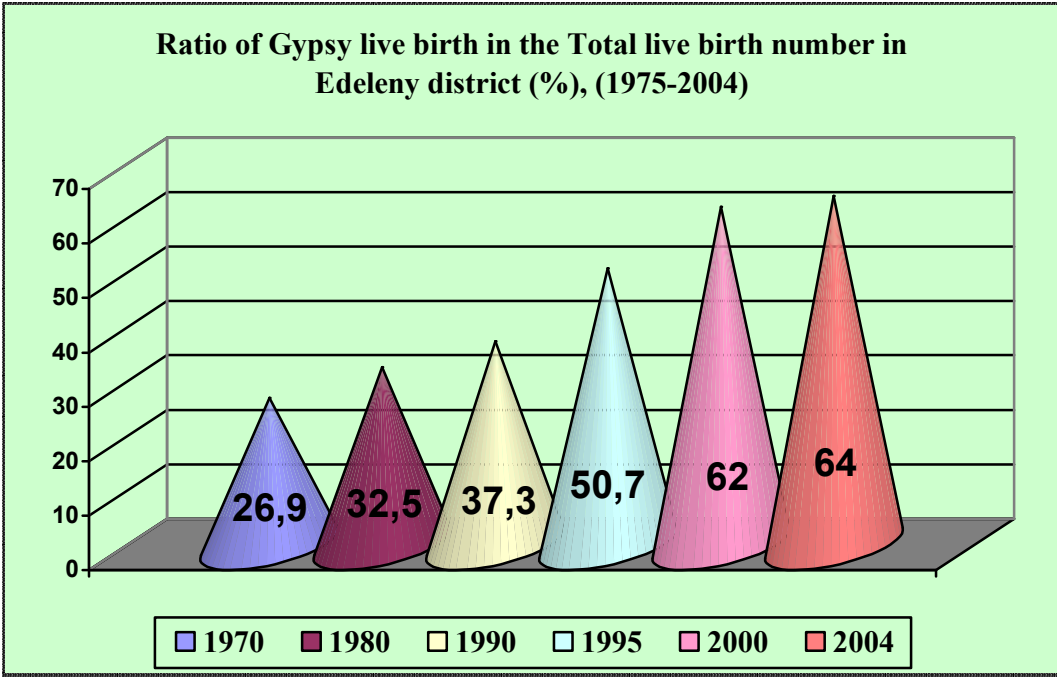
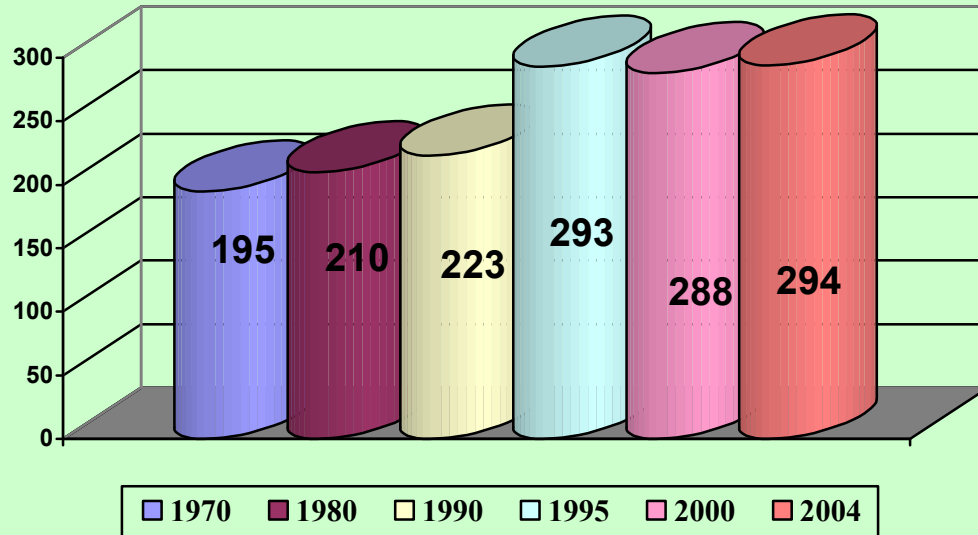


Figure 4.



Number of Gypsy live birth in the Total live birth number in Edeleny district (%), (1975-2004)



**Some explanations for the change
Proliferation of adolescent motherhood
(Figures 5-6, Table 4 - 5)**

Table 4.

Gypsy mother's mean age at their first childbirths by cohorts in **Lapos**, 2004

Mother's year of birth	Mother's age at first childbirth	N
x-1950	20.1	10
1951-1969	19.2	37
1970- 1979	18.6	22
1980-x	17.6	22

Table 5.

Gypsy mother's mean age at their first childbirths by cohorts in **Rakaca**, 2004

Mother's year of birth	Mother's age at first childbirth	N
x-1950	20.8	20
1951-1969	19.8	55
1970- 1979	18.9	31
1980-x	18.7	21

Figure 5.

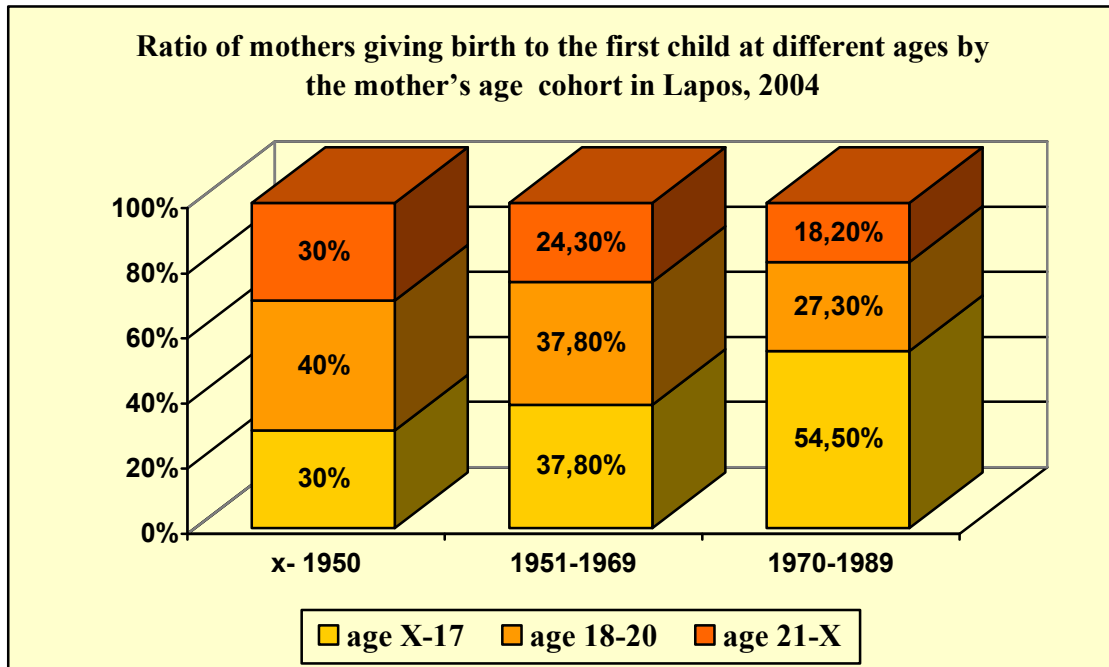
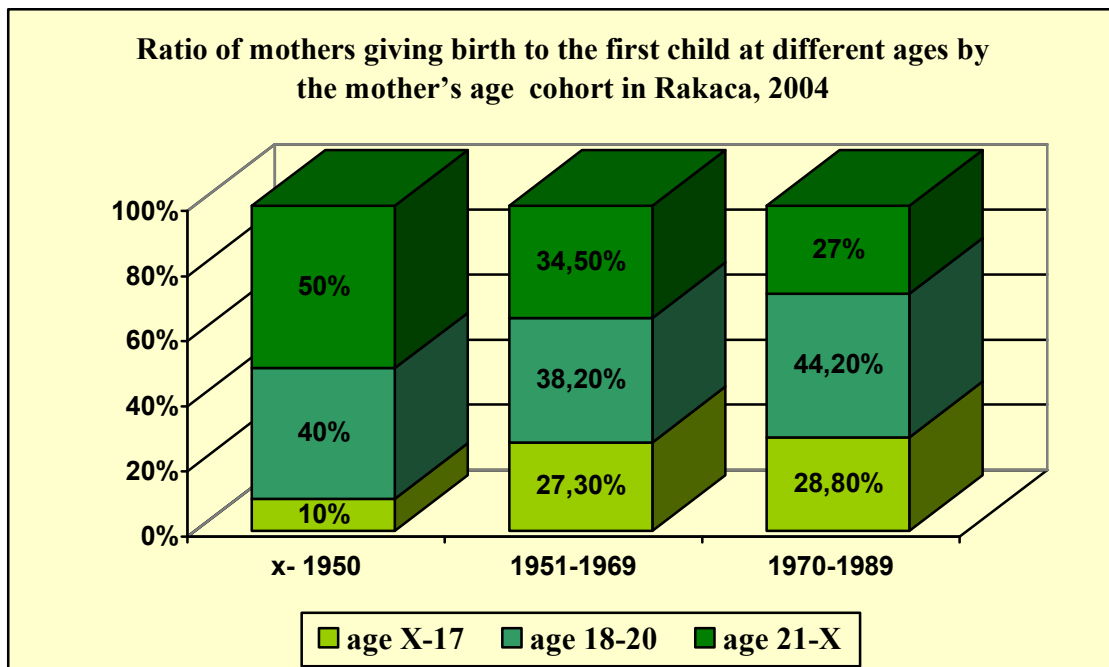


Figure 6.



Reasons for the proliferation of Adolescent motherhood

1. **Persistent Poverty**- the poverty of outlook
2. **Lack of formal schooling**
3. **Social exclusion** and the **neighbourhood effect** - the Exodus of the better off Gypsy middle class: lack of available role models other than the “Ghetto Poor” – homogenised network - exclusive, decisive effect of the peer group on behaviour of the teenagers
4. **Family background** – escape from the family of origin
5. Increasing **status** in the Gypsy community: Having a baby, becoming a mother as the only “**Passage to adulthood**”
6. **Nothing to lose, a lot to gain:**

Gain:

- STATUS in the Gypsy community, in the peer group
- Self-esteem, respect, pride in having their own Baby
- The baby provides a large part of the youth mother’s “positive” identity

Change of Marriage Pattern

(Figure 7, Table 6-7)

The danger of ethnocentrism: “the danger of mistaking what another people call marriage with what we call marriage in our society”.

Whilst the ‘official’ survey data (using the legal definition of marriage) shows an increase in the age of marriage for the Gypsy women in Lapos, ethnographic data reveals the opposite. If we call marriage what the Gypsies in Lapos and in Rakaca mean by marriage, we have to say that one of the explanations for the high fertility in the given Roma communities is that virtually all the adult community are living in monogamous married relationship and that most of them get married on average at the age of 16. Our ethnographic research has also revealed that marriage has to be taken here as a process more than a distinct event. (figure 7).

Table 6.

Gypsy women’s mean age at marriage by year of marriage in Lapos

Year of marriage	Woman’s mean age at marriage	Number of women married
x- 1970	20.5	11
1971-1988	18.7	27
1989- 2004	20.8	28

Figure 7.

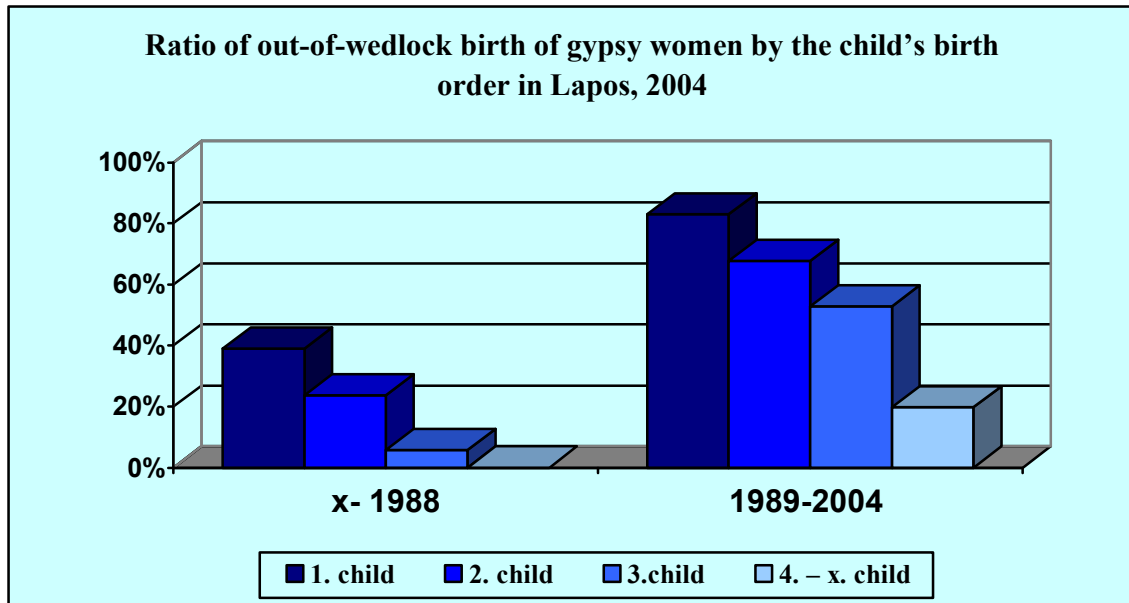


Table 7.

Ratio of all children born to the same mother by one or more biological father's, Lapos

Child's year of birth	1 (identical) father	2 or more (different) father	Total
x- 1988	86.5 %	13.5 %	100 %
1989-2004	83.3 %	17.7 %	100 %