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The Roma Population of Small Towns

Introduction

The present study analyzes the situation of the Roma population in three small towns in Hajdú-Bihar County. The study is based on research commissioned by the municipalities in 2004.¹ The situation of the Roma is based on an analysis of the statistical database of the research final report, which, however, was only one dimension of the total 2004 study. The study provides a descriptive analysis of the results of the empirical research. The social situation and health state of the Roma are discussed using a structural approach. Due to the aims of the study and the data collected, a cultural approach and explanation was not included as part of this study.

The data was collected on a household basis. Those who were considered members of the household, their income situation, expenses, problems, support systems, health status and their expectations and preferences were analyzed. Research on this empirical database was conducted in 2004, and was analyzed in a situation analysis within the framework of a "service-planning concept" that was required for the planning of the social public services in towns with more than 2000 inhabitants.

Hajdú-Bihar County is located in the north-eastern part of Hungary and is one of the three counties of the North Great Plain Region. The population of the county is 547,000 and its center is Debrecen, with 211,000 inhabitants. Hajdú-Bihar county (hereinafter referred to as the "county") can be found in one of the poorer areas of Hungary, where unemployment is almost two times higher than the national average and the incomes are only half of those in the capital. The county is situated in a region where the percentage of Roma in the population is

1 The research in the three towns was organized by Erika Zolnai. Students from the University of Debrecen Faculty of Health were the interviewers.

high. The estimated percentage of the Roma population in the North Great Plain Region is 8–9%. The percentage of Roma living in this county is a little lower. Nationally, the number of Roma is estimated to be 800,000 (approximately 8% of the total inhabitants of Hungary). In the 2011 census 315,000 people in Hungary (3.1% of the total population) identified themselves as Roma, while this number was 18,000 (3.4%) in the county (Central Bureau of Statistics: 2011, Census 2 and 3).

Hungarian law considers ethnicity such a sensitive topic that response to the question of one's ethnicity in the census is considered a personal decision. Thus, the census data do not reflect the actual number of Roma. The law (on protection of personal data) does not allow any recording of ethnicity, thus the estimate of the number of Roma is the result of academic research studies.

The Roma are the largest ethnic minority group in Hungary. There are three main groups of Hungarian Roma. The Romungro (the "Hungarian Gypsies"), who have been living in Hungary since the 14th century and speak Hungarian, are the largest group. Many of the Vlach (*oláh*) Gypsies (the second largest group) speak both the Lovary Gypsy language and Hungarian and identify themselves as Roma. Beas (Boyas) Gypsies belong to the third group, who settled in the south-western part of the country. They are Romanian in origin and, in addition to Hungarian, many of them speak the old Romanian language (Kemény, 2000).

Bilingualism is typical with a part of the Vlach Gypsy/Roma and the Beas Gypsies. There are also debates about the name Roma/Gypsy. Gypsy is an external classification which does not take the identification of the "identified" into consideration. The term "Roma" is the self-identification of the Vlach Gypsies, and is the term that has been widely used in the public discourse and the media to apply to all the Roma/Gypsy groups, disregarding their self-identification. This study uses the word Roma to identify all of the groups. Hungarian Roma live predominantly in the north-eastern and south-western parts of the country where the unemployment rate is high and incomes are low.

Since the research was conducted in three small towns, it is important to determine what these towns have in common. The social histories of these towns are quite similar; they were characterised by short periods of boom followed by frequent stagnation, deterioration and decay, mainly during the Turkish occupation. However, the response to these adverse processes was typical of the urban-agricultural division that was widespread in the Great Plain region, with peasant-bourgeois development based on extensive animal keeping. These possibilities, however, were limited, mainly during the time when the towns were deprived of their privileges.

The three small towns can be referred to as *hajdú*² towns with these restrictions: during the Dual Monarchy³ they experienced a significant peasant bourgeois development which affected the social structure, the way of life, the values, and the organization of the social life (casinos, associations). Socialism had a contradictory effect on these municipalities. As a result of their territorial peculiarities and their social history they had always been agricultural municipalities, but the transformation of agriculture into collective farms could not support the employment of the population and thus commuting and migration started to evolve, resulting in a decrease of the towns' populations.

The political changes of 25 years ago had different effects on the three towns. Stagnation was common in all of them, but the changes of the last few years have generated serious differences among the municipalities. The winner was Hajdúsámson; the population of the town, which had been stagnating for decades, increased by 3,000 people as a result of people moving out of Debrecen,⁴ thus Sámson entered the ranks of successful suburban municipalities. For Polgár, the proximity of the M3 motorway may prove a turning point, although the results cannot yet be felt. From among the three small towns, the situation of Hajdúhadház is the most controversial; despite the proximity of both Debrecen and Nyíregyháza (the other significant city of the area), no favourable suburban processes have been experienced. The percentage of the Roma population is high in this town, with low qualifications, high unemployment and low income (Town details – online sources).

To what extent can the results concerning the Roma population in these rural small towns be generalized, that is, how do they reflect the overall situation of the Roma in Hungary? It is often said that the living conditions of the Roma in Hungary can be easily seen in their school results, which show a realistic picture of the *rural Roma* living in northern Hungary. This is important because the majority of Hungarian Roma live in "rural" villages and small towns. Only 10%

2 The word *hajdú* means "drover." Drovers with their animals travelled armed and sometimes ended up as highwaymen, mercenaries or perhaps landowners. Many towns in eastern Hungary with some 10,000 mercenaries got this word as the first element of their names as a reward for supporting Prince István Bocskay. Being a "*hajdú*" town meant an urban privileged status.

3 The period between 1867 and 1918, when the Hungarian Kingdom together with Austria formed Austria-Hungary, referred to as the dual Monarchy.

4 This small town is nine km away from the center of the county, Debrecen, the second largest city in Hungary and a centre of higher education and the determinative city of the region.

of the Roma live in Budapest and 10% in other big cities. The urban (mainly in Budapest) Roma have more possibilities when compared to the Roma living in the countryside, although their living situation, segregation and discrimination are similar to those in the rural areas.

Method and sample

Questionnaires were used to gather data and were developed based on previous research studies conducted during the past decade so their results could be compared to those of earlier research studies (Fónai, et al., 2008; Fónai, Péntes & Vitál, 2006; Fónai, et al., 2007). The samples were taken using the same procedures in each municipality. Every fifth or sixth household was included in the sample, which is a rather high rate. *Households* were the unit of measurement, which provided the possibility to select them on the basis of the address register in each municipality. As the address register is electronic in each town, during the selection process a program service was used. Based on simple random sampling procedure, the Roma living in the municipalities had an equal chance of being included in the sample.

The 2001 census reported that the permanent population of Hajdúhadház was 12,747 people living in 4,126 households (Territorial data, 2001). From among these households, 801, nearly one-fifth (19.4%) provided data. The permanent population of Hajdúszámson was 10,638, with 3,481 households and of these 751 (21.6%) responded to the questionnaire and provided data. The permanent population of Polgár was 8,455 in 2001 living in 3,287 households of which 503 (15.5%) responded to the questionnaire, or about every sixth household.

Ethnic affiliation of the heads of the households

The 2004 research used the following method of ethnic classification. First, the interviewers were asked to judge if the interviewees were Roma. This classification provided the opportunity for the interviewer to classify the interviewees as Roma, non-Roma or undecided. This corresponds to the external classification process ("A Roma is a person who is considered to be a Roma by the non-Roma environment").⁵ At the same time, the possibility was allowed for self-classification of ethnic identity. Those who were thought to be Roma by the interviewers were asked if they classified themselves as Roma, with 88% of those who were

5 This corresponds to the process applied during the Hungarian Roma research (e.g., Kemény, Janky & Lengyel, 2004).

classified as Roma by the interviewers classifying themselves as Roma. Hereafter, only those cases who classified themselves as Roma were considered Roma for the study (it is possible that on the basis of self-classification, a part of the Roma were classified as non-Roma by the interviewers).

Table 1: The distribution of the heads of household in the sample according to ethnic affiliation

	Roma*	Non-Roma
Hajdúhadház**	10.9%	89.1%
Hajdúsámson**	6.0%	94.0%
Polgár**	4.2%	95.8%
TOTAL	7.4%	92.6%

Source: own data.

* Those who identified themselves as Roma after the classification of the interviewer

** Roma: in Hajdúhadház 87, in Hajdúsámson 45, in Polgár 21 heads of households and households

In Hajdúhadház 505 persons live in the 87 Roma households included in the sample, corresponding to 5.8 persons per household, as compared to the city average which is 3.08 persons per household. In Hajdúsámson 212 people live in 45 Roma households which equals 4.7 persons per household and corresponds to the city average of 3.07 persons per household. In Polgár the number of members of its 21 Roma households was 102 which was 4.86 persons per household, while the city average was 2.55 persons per household. Based on this data the following estimates can be given regarding the number of Roma living in each town.

Hajdúhadház: 11% (454) of the households are estimated to be Roma. Taking the average number of those living in households into consideration, the Roma population of the town can be estimated to be about 2,630 or about 21% of the entire population of the town. In the 2001 census 1,336 people considered themselves to be Roma (Census 2001, 6.1 Territorial data: 142). In conducting the census it is not unusual that, for a variety of reasons, a significant part of the Roma do not report their ethnic identity.⁶

6 This is seen in the 2001 census data and the differences among various academic research studies. In the 2001 census 190,046 persons considered themselves to be Roma. At the same time various academic studies estimated the number of Roma living in Hungary to be about a half million. We have already referred to the 2011 census and to the estimated data.

In Hajdúsámson about 6% (204) of the households are Roma. Taking the number of households into consideration, in 2004, the total number of Roma could be estimated to be about 960 (about 10% of the population of the town). The population of the town increased by 3,000 in the 1990s. Two groups played a great role in this growth – middle-class people from Debrecen who moved to the western suburb of the town and the Roma, who moved to the outskirts of the town.

In Polgár in 2004, on the basis of the ethnic affiliation of the head of households, about 4–5% could be considered as Roma, or about 146 households that would include approximately 710 people, or 9% of the population of the town.

Compared to the other municipalities of the county, the percentage of Roma population in these three towns is high. There are only a few municipalities where the percentage of Roma is significant. In the following sections all results will be based on ethnic affiliation and an analysis of the individual cities will not be reported.

The composition of households and characteristics of the heads of households

The interviewers, who visited the households to conduct the research, interviewed the heads of the households or, if they could not reach them, their spouses. The majority of respondents were women and corresponds to earlier research experience where the percentage of Roma women responding was 65% (with the non-Roma this figure was 67%). Their educational qualifications and economic activity greatly influenced the conditions of the heads of the households and their families. There is a high correlation between them.

Table 2: The distribution of the heads of households according to school education

	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004	Total Country
Incomplete elementary school	36.8%	12.5%	12.7%
Complete elementary school	51.3%	35.5%	28.8%
Secondary Technical school, Vocational school	11.2	21.9%	22.5%
Secondary grammar school with final exam	0.7%	23.2%	21.2%
University or College qualification	0.0%	6.8%	14.9%

Source: Census 2001, own data.

In the three municipalities the school qualification⁷ of the head of households is significantly lower than the national levels. The qualification of the non-Roma for secondary and incomplete elementary school qualification is lower than the national levels, while those who have university or college qualification is significantly lower and those who have completed only elementary school is significantly higher than the national levels. The qualifications for the Roma are very similar to the results of the national Roma research studies (Kemény, Janky & Lengyel, 2004), with most completing elementary school and with the most typical higher qualification of vocational school. The percentage of those who completed secondary school with the final exam is negligible and there were no heads of households who held a university or college degree. The level of education is significant in that it is the foundation for economic activity.

Table 3: The distribution of the heads of households according to economic activity

	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004	Total Hungary Census 2001
Employed	17.9%	35.4%	48.4%
Unemployed	21.2%	5.9%	4.6%
Inactive earner	50.4%	53.8%	44.8%
Dependent	10.6%	4.9%	2.2%

Source: Census 2001, own data.

Even when compared to the low level of national employment, the employment level of the interviewed heads of households is clearly much lower. The employment level for the non-Roma is only two-thirds lower (66%) than the national one, while that of the Roma is scarcely one-third (33%) of the national rate, with only every fifth head of household employed. The rate of unemployment is high mainly among the Roma, but that of the dependent head of household is particularly high. The level of unemployment is similar to the

7 The Hungarian school system is as follows: elementary school is for eight years. After that there are three choices: three-year vocational schools (at the time of the survey these lasted for four years); four-year secondary technical school and four-year secondary grammar school. The latter two end with a final exam, which is a prerequisite for higher education. Vocational school is a sort of dead end, as it provides only a certificate without access to further studies.

data of other national Roma research studies (Kemény, Janky & Lengyel, 2004). The low qualification of the Roma heads of households and their low employment, along with other factors, help to explain the household income data and levels listed below.

Their composition and some indicators of the households

There are great differences among the households and families of the Roma and non-Roma regarding their ages, qualifications and employment. The distribution of age shows a striking difference. For the Roma the largest age group is children, a segment twice as large as that of the non-Roma. The age chart of the Roma shows that the percentage of those between 0–14 is nearly five times higher than that of those over 60. In the sample, the percentages of minors and the elderly is a bit higher than the percentages found in national research conducted in 2003 (Kemény, Janky and Lengyel, 2004: 18).

Table 4: The distribution of all the people living in the households by age groups

Age	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004	Hajdú-Bihar county, 2001
0–14 years	40.3%	17.4%	18.6%
15–39 years	31.8%	37.8%	36.2%
40–59 years	19.6%	24.6%	26.6%
over 60	8.3%	20.8%	18.6%

Source: Census 2001, own data.

The distribution of the non-Roma population in the three small towns is very similar to that of the total population of the country, while the age distribution of the Roma can be seen as a pyramid with the younger ages at its base. Thus, the number of dependents is high in the Roma families. This high percentage of minors in the population is a serious consideration for the municipalities as it has a major effect on the activities of public education, child welfare and family-care institutions. One of its consequences is the qualification achieved by the Roma population, which is only somewhat determined by the high percentage of the minors among the Roma, because as we know, low qualification has several, interrelated causes (Fiáth, 2000; Forray and Hegedűs 1998, 2003). The school qualifications of the Roma population in the three small towns are not different from the national educational level of the Roma (data is from the entire population and not by age groups).

Table 5: The distribution of all people living in the households by educational qualification

	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004	Hajdú-Bihar county Total 2001
Incomplete elementary school	42.8%	17.9%	23.3%
Complete elementary school	46.1%	29.9%	27.1%
Secondary Technical school, Vocational school	9.6%	23.4%	21.1%
Secondary grammar school with final exam	1.5%	22.8%	20.3%
University or College qualification	0.0%	5.9%	7.6%

Source: Census 2001, own data.

The school qualifications of the non-Roma in the three towns are the same as was found in the 2001 census. The qualifications of the Roma are much lower, as previously stated, partly because of the large number of young children, and the most typical is elementary school qualification (as was found in the national Roma research studies). The qualifications of the heads of the households are slightly higher than those of the rest of the family members with the percentage of those completing elementary school being the largest, and a vocational school certificate being the highest qualification that Roma family members have a chance to obtain. The percentage of those who have secondary school education is very low. The result of the low educational qualifications and age distribution (and given that other factors are also related, such as labour market possibilities) is that there is a high percentage of dependents and a low percentage of employment in the Roma households and families.

Table 6: The distribution of the all persons living in households by economic activity

	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town data 2004	Hajdú-Bihar county, 2001
Employed	21.3%	40.6%	34.7%
Unemployed	16.9%	8.7%	6.4%
Inactive earner	19.4%	23.9%	36.4%
Dependent	42.3%	20.7%	22.5%

Source: Census 2001, own data.

There is an obvious difference between the economic activity of the total population and the heads of households. The employment level of the interviewed Roma

heads of households is only about two-thirds of the level of all heads of households in the county, while unemployment (registered and not registered) is three and a half times larger. Taking all the family members into consideration, the employment situation of the Roma households is slightly more favourable than that of the heads of households. This can be partially explained by the better labour market positions of the young adults in the families, although this indicator is still only half of the percentage of the non-Romas living in these towns. Taking all the family members into consideration, the percentage of inactive earners decreases significantly, which can be explained by the low number of pensioners and by the number of those who remained in the family, e.g., young mothers. At the same time, there are a greater number of younger members in Roma families (the number of dependents are the highest in Roma families). Their percentage is two times higher than that of the total population in the county.

The furnishings and the income situation of the households

The situation of the households can be characterized by their living conditions, ownership of property, the size and the furnishings of the apartments. In the three towns, 88% of the Roma own their own apartments and 6.5% live in rented apartments, which is equivalent to the national and county data for the same year of the study. The apartments of the Roma families differ from those of the non-Roma in their age, floor space and furnishings, but do not differ in the total number of rooms. The sample shows that, for example, the average number of rooms in Roma households is 2.25, while this number in the non-Roma households is 2.45. There is, however, a difference in the floor space of the apartments. Floor space is larger with an average of 89.19 m² for the non-Roma apartments, compared to 78.55 m² in the case of the Roma apartments. Surprisingly, the average age of the Roma apartments is lower (30 years) than that of the non-Roma apartments (35 years), which can be related to the changes in the housing subsidy system of the last decades. The rate of apartments less than five years old is 12.5% for the Roma families, while for the non-Roma families it is only 5.8%.

Table 7: The floor space of the apartments and homes

Floor space in square meters	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004	Hajdú-Bihar county, Total 2001
0–29	1.2%	0.8%	0.4%
30–39	1.2%	1.7%	3.2%
40–49	4.7%	3.3%	4.9%

Floor space in square meters	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004	Hajdú-Bihar county, Total 2001
50–59	8.2%	5.3%	9.1%
60–79	31.8%	21.0%	23.30%
80–99	35.3%	32.2%	32.2%
100–x	17.6%	35.8%	26.9%

Source: Census 2001, own data.

Since the apartments of the Roma households/families, although slightly newer, have the same number of rooms but less floor space – the number of persons living in one room will be higher, and thus, the apartments will be more crowded. Another significant difference can be seen in the level of comfort and their furnishings, which is related to the income situation of the households and it is not accidental that they are suitable indicators to characterize poverty.

Table 8: Indicators of the comfort level of the households according to their occurrence*

	Roma, small town 2004	Non Roma, small town 2004	Hajdú-Bihar county, 2001
Kitchen	92.8%	98.8%	
Bathroom	56.9%	93.8%	
Running water	55.6%	93.6%	85.1%
Flush toilet	43.1%	89.7%	80.2%
Sanitation	6.5%	38.4%	42.7%
Latrine	60.1%	60.3%	
Central heating (with coal)	11.8%	31.2%	
Gas heating	15.7%	68.6%	61.2%
Stove	38.6%	18.3%	
Only one or two rooms are heated	39.2%	12.0%	
Bottled gas (for cooking)	45.8%	28.4%	23.3%
Traditional Stove (for cooking)	24.3%	6.0%	

Source: Census 2001, own data.

* Only where there are comparable data

There are real differences in the comfort levels of the apartments of Roma and non-Roma inhabitants. While the comfort level and furnishings of the non-Roma apartments are similar to or even better than the indicators of the total households in the county, there are two areas where the apartments of the Roma

population are much worse: running water/bathroom and in the methods of heating. Only every other Roma household has running water, a bathroom and a flush toilet; and only about one-third of the households heat all the rooms of the apartment. These data are similar to the data of the national Roma study in 2003 (Kemény, Janky and Lengyel, 2004). As has already been noted, these indicators are highly correlated to income and poverty. Similar differences can be seen in the case of the furnishings of the apartments.

*Table 9: How the households are furnished with durable consumer goods (the percentage of their occurrence in households)**

	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004	Hajdú-Bihar county, Totals 2004
Color TV	82%	96%	143%
(Cell)phone	52%	82%	138%
Automatic washing machine	16%	62%	65%
Freezer	22%	66%	62%
Video recorder	28%	51%	53%
HI-FI	20%	34%	32%
Computer	2%	25%	22%
CD player	13%	34%	20%
Car	9%	44%	46%
DVD player	5%	16%	13%
Dishwasher	2%	5%	2%
Video camera	1%	6%	5%
Internet access	0%	5%	10%
Weekend garden, plot	1%	5%	
Holiday home	0%	1%	

Source: Hajdú-Bihar county Statistical Annual 2004, own data.

* Only where there are comparable data

There are significant differences between the Roma and non-Roma families in their furnishings. In the Roma families the most common consumer product is a color television. Cell phones, the second most widespread consumer product, were found in only about half of the families in 2004. Overall the most common types of consumer goods were electronic products. In other research, the traditional mixing plate washing machine was also on the list and in this study the furnishings of the households were closer to the non-Roma households. The biggest difference, which basically can be explained by income, was in

information-communication devices, where a twelve-fold difference could be seen between the Roma and non-Roma households in the number of personal computers. There was a sizeable difference as well in the number of cell phones, and in 2004 the Roma heads of households did not report any Internet access.

Income and the income situation of the households

The comfort level and furnishings of the Roma families/households (in fact, poverty experienced in the home can be characterized by these indicators as well) are determined by the level of income of the families. Significantly, social transfers are often sources of income for the Roma families. These income transfers help to determine the structure and the size of the income as well.⁸ The sources of income from those in the study are shown in the table below. The table of the sources shows only *the most common ones* from the possible 27 income sources. It should be noted that the amount of income from these sources was not analyzed.

Table 10: *The most frequently occurring income sources*

	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004
Family allowance	62.5%	25.9%
Regular social support	49.3%	6.6%
Child care, maternity allowance	42.0%	10.3%
Full time employee income	28.7%	47.7%
Pension	26.2%	47.4%
Occasional work, day-labour	23.2%	3.6%
Disability pension	14.1%	13.9%
Educational assistance	9.9%	1.4%
Community work	8.5%	0.8%
Unemployment benefit	5.6%	3.2%
Orphan care	4.9%	2.1%
Entrepreneurial income	2.1%	4.7%
Agricultural income of farmers	1.4%	1.6%

The sources of income for the Roma and the non-Roma differ significantly. The most frequent incomes of the non-Roma are the pension-like allowances,

8 See, e.g., Kemény, Janky & Lengyel, 2004; Fónai, Fábán, Filepné & Péntes, 2007.

employee incomes followed by the family allowance. For the Roma the role of allowances related to children and benefits in connection with the social situation are significant. In the towns studied, income from casual work and day-labor is nearly as common as full-time employment income, which corresponds to the employment rate of the Roma. Compared with the non-Roma, the rate of pension-type allowances as income sources is lower, which can be explained by the differences in the age groups and economic activity. Community work, which has generated much debate, was scarcely mentioned by the non-Roma, while the Roma mentioned it ten times more frequently.

Household incomes represent clearly the social status of the households and families. This study analyzes several indicators of household incomes according to the self-declaration of the respondents ("How much is your average total household income?"). The annual income per capita of the Roma and non-Roma households in 2004⁹ is shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Annual incomes per capita

	HUF	USD
Country, total	784.093	3.597
North Great Plain Region	673.621	3.239
Hajdú-Bihar county	693.825	3.336
Non-Roma, small town	494.400	2.377
Roma, small town	226.920	1.091
Small town sample total	475.692	2.287

Source: KSH, 2005, own data.

The income data show that the North Great Plain Region is disadvantaged compared to other regions, and that the income disadvantage of the small towns compared to the county may be attributed to the income levels of the county municipality. It is striking that *the annual income per capita for the Roma living in small towns is only one-third of the national annual net income per capita*. Thus, their 18,910 HUF per month per capita income (91 dollars) was similar to the national equivalent indicator for the Roma in 2003, which was 20,852 HUF (100 dollars) (Kemény, Janky and Lengyel, 2004: 120). The average of the towns was only two-thirds of the county average and, in addition, there are serious differences between the three towns.

9 In 2004, during the research period the HUF exchange rate to USD was: 1 USD = 208 HUF.

These low incomes explain the high percentage of people living under the average level.¹⁰ In the sample, 87.8% percent of the Roma households are considered poor, while 33.5% of the non-Roma can be regarded as poor. The poverty indicator for the non-Roma in the towns is also nearly three times greater than the national rate that was calculated using a similar method (in 2001, Gábos and Szívós determined the poverty rate to be 12.1% on the basis of half of the average income [Gábos & Szívós, 2002: 48]).

Income indicators by quintiles are shown in the table below (analysis by deciles could not be measured because of the number of households involved in the sample). The average income of each quintile shows the differences between the income level of the Roma and the non-Roma, which, beyond the low household incomes, there is a significant difference for members of the households.

Table 12: Monthly Net income per capita in each income quintile in HUF and USD

Quintile	Roma, small town 2004		Non-Roma, small town2004		Country, total 2004	
	HUF	USD	HUF	USD	HUF	USD
First	14,382	69.1	32,958	158.5	27,491	132.2
Second	16,971	81.6	36,288	174.5	43,475	209.1
Third	17,554	84.3	37,110	178.4	54,275	260.9
Fourth	21,976	105.6	41,620	200.1	76,568	368.1
Fifth	38,100	183.2	57,398	275.9	111,426	535.7

Source: Data calculated on the basis of Voszka, 2006 and own data.

The incomes represented by quintiles show significant differences compared to the national levels and the actual low household incomes of the Roma. In 2004 the average monthly net income of Hungarian households was 162,448 HUF, or 781 USD (calculated data, on the basis of Voszka, 2006: 8). The three towns' equivalent indicators were 102,530 HUF (or 493 USD); with 83,280 HUF (or 400 USD) for the Roma, and 103,980 HUF (or 500 USD) for the non-Roma. Having such low incomes raises the question about what the income expectations of the households are, that is, what amount would be sufficient for them to live a "worry-free life."

All the interviewed heads of households considered 202,920 HUF (976 USD) to be sufficient. This is about two times higher than their actual household

10 On the basis of one of the relative poverty indicators, half of the people living below the average income are considered to be poor.

incomes. Specifically, in the case of the Roma, this amount was 210.510 HUF (1.012 USD), while in the case of the non-Roma it was 202.360 HUF, (973 USD). What they think would be enough for a worry-free life correlated with their actual income situation: the higher the income of the household, the higher the amount they thought would be enough. As the number of members in a Roma household is almost two times larger than that of the non-Roma households, the “expected income” is nearly half that of the non-Roma households when one considers the estimated sum’s per capita worth. The life situation of the Roma families are mainly determined by the types of income, the amount of income and other forms of poverty, for example, housing poverty. This then raises questions concerning what allowances and benefits the Roma families get and to whom they can turn if they have problems.

Problems and help; support systems

The list of potential problems for families is not essentially different for the Roma and non-Roma living in the three towns. They are: finances, illness, unemployment and psychological problems. The Roma emphasized their financial problems with three-quarters (75%) of the respondents considering it to be their most important problem. Of the non-Roma, 50% rate financial problems as most important; they also mention illness (20%) more often than the Roma (10%). Unemployment was cited by about 12% of respondents in both ethnic groups. Forty-four percent of the non-Roma report problems in connection with neighbors and problems with the Roma. The table below shows how the claim for social supports forms the life situation perceived as poverty.

Table 13: Claimed and obtained supports (the top five types of support)¹¹

	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004
Regular social support	45.9%	6.4%
Regular child protection support	42.6%	7.6%
Child care support	25.2%	6.0%
Public health care identification card	11.5%	10.8%
Income support	6.1%	3.4%

Source: Own data.

¹¹ The interviewed could select more than one possibility.

The list of claimed and obtained support shows that Roma families get support related to their financial situation. For example, almost half of the families are eligible for regular social support. For most forms of support differences prevail between the Roma and the non-Roma. The situation is similar when they obtain social supports, since from the 23 types of support, only five were reported to be successful by both the Roma and non-Roma interviewed. The most frequent was social catering and was mentioned by 11% of Roma families and by 5.3% of the non-Roma families. The other forms of support are marginal with 2.8% of the Roma heads of households mentioning the services of the family care center, and 1.4% the child welfare center and the nurseries. This indicates that the Roma living in the municipalities that were studied primarily use social supports and not institutional services, although it depends on the institutions and supports of the given municipalities.

Due to their low income, families often run out of money from month to month. While 80% of the Roma heads of households said that this has occurred, 55% of the non-Roma families mentioned it. Their different reactions to this situation demonstrate the differences in income, as only 2% of the Roma families are able to use funds from savings, while 14% of non-Roma families start to use their savings. In the Roma households, 14% will sell something, while this occurs in only 5% of the non-Roma families. Twenty-four percent (24%) of the Roma heads of households take on more work. On the basis of their other responses, this is typically casual work or day-labor. Only 13% of the non-Roma respondents give this response. In such situations, 40% of the Roma families and 45% of the non-Roma families spend less, and 18% of the Roma families and only 2% of the non-Roma families ask for support. When they run out of money, 88% of the Roma heads of households and 44% of their non-Roma counterparts ask for a loan if it is necessary.

Table 14: Whom they can ask for a loan

	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004
Family, relatives	69.9%	63.0%
Neighbors	33.1%	9.9%
Friends	24.1%	9.6%
Acquaintances	21.8%	8.4%
Private people for interest	18.0%	1.0%
Local Government	16.0%	1.5%
Banks	14.0%	13.1%
Family Care Center	5.5%	0.4%

	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004
Colleagues	4.6%	1.8%
Churches	2.3%	0.5%

Source: Own data.

The role of the family for both the Roma and the non-Roma is clear and is a support system that they can rely on. For the Roma the widely interpreted family relationships and the mutual support system of the ethnic community are also very important. It is remarkable that formal institutions, including banks, play a relatively small role, although it is a role played by certain institutions, for example, to define the conditions on how to get bank loan. Among the Roma respondents one-fifth take out usurious loans, but there are very few research studies about this topic (see: Hüse, Szoboszlai & Fábán, 2006 and Hüse, Szoboszlai & Fábán, 2008). This practice may affect, and it is only an estimate, more than half of Roma families. The subject was brought to the attention of the media and politicians during the time this study was conducted. The role of the family as the primary natural support system was judged by the respondents by asking how much they can rely on the different informal (natural) and formal support systems or networks when they have problems.

Table 15: When you have problems how much do you rely on the sources listed below? (scale: 1–3 averages)

	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004
Family	1.61	1.42
Neighbors	2.17	2.20
Friends	2.24	2.24
Mayor's Office	2.76	2.81
Colleagues	2.78	2.62
Churches	2.82	2.86
Representatives of Minority Government	2.83	2.98
Family Care Center	2.88	2.93
Parties	2.94	2.94
Associations, Foundations	2.96	2.95

Source: Own data. Three rating levels: 1 = very much, 2 = slightly, 3 = not at all.

The family as a support system in the case of both the Roma and the non-Roma is important. Both ethnic groups believe that *it is basically only their families that*

they can rely on whenever they have problems. This is a major finding that informs the helping professions. For the Roma (although they may ask for a financial loan from their neighbors and acquaintances) the role of the ethnic community can be interpreted as a family or relations and also can be a primary source of support. It should be noted how little they consider the role of the representatives of the minority self-governments when they have problems.

Health status

The study examined the health status of the Roma from a structural approach, with the assumption that health status is heavily determined by social status, similarly to educational qualifications, economic activity and income. Factors underlying health behaviors, such as the influence of ethnic culture or an analysis of life styles, are not the subject of this study. Those interviewed were asked to rate their health status on a ten point scale (1 = very poor health; 10 = excellent health). The average ratings were 5.89 for Roma men and 6.19 for Roma women, while non-Roma men rated it to be 5.99 and non-Roma women 5.81. These data correspond to the results of previous research (Fónai, Fábián, Filepné and Péntzes, 2007; Fónai, Fábián, Filepné and Péntzes, 2008). Health status is also indirectly indicated by how often doctors were visited. Two questions were asked to measure the frequency of seeing doctors.

Table 16: *How often do you visit a doctor?*

	General Practitioner		Specialist		Dentist	
	Roma	Non-Roma	Roma	Non-Roma	Roma	Non-Roma
Several times a week	1.3%	1.8%	0.0%	0.5%	0.7%	0.4%
Several times a month	23.0%	30.7%	9.3%	7.3%	0.0%	0.5%
Several times a year	30.3%	29.8%	11.9%	23.1%	2.7%	5.4%
Once or twice a year	28.9%	22.0%	30.5%	29.8%	10.7%	18.5%
Rarely	15.1%	12.8%	43.0%	32.9%	70.5%	61.1%
Does not feel it necessary	1.3%	2.9%	5.3%	6.5%	15.4%	14.0%

Source: Own data.

In examining how often the Roma and the non-Roma visit doctors it was found that there were less differences in visiting a general practitioner (GP) than there were with visiting specialists. The biggest difference can be seen in how often they visit dentists, although even non-Roma see their dentists very rarely. Visiting

GPs was most commonly mentioned. This is also supported by the ranking of the responses given to the questions about specialists. The frequency of using different provisions can also be used to assist in characterizing health status. On this list GPs were the most visited, with one-third of the Roma and four-tenths of the non-Roma visiting their GPs regularly. They are followed by specialists, as one-eighth of the Roma and one-fifth of the non-Roma regularly visit specialists. Additionally, the frequency of complaints and illnesses was also asked ("Have you been treated by doctors for the listed illnesses or complaints?").

Table 17: Percentages of Complaints and illnesses reported

	Roma, small town 2004	Non-Roma, small town 2004
High blood pressure	19.6%	30.5%
Locomotor disease	14.4%	18.8%
Eye problems	12.4%	24.1%
Allergic diseases	10.5%	10.1%
Other heart problems	7.2%	10.9%
Asthma	7.2%	3.8%
Neurological diseases	7.2%	7.0%
Heart attack	5.2%	3.5%
Chronic respiratory diseases	5.2%	4.4%
Stomach or duodenal ulcer	5.2%	5.8%
Hearing problems	5.2%	7.4%
Mental problems	5.2%	3.2%
Angina attack	4.6%	5.9%
High blood sugar level	4.6%	10.4%
Liver disease	3.9%	1.4%
High cholesterol level	2.0%	9.0%
Stroke	1.3%	2.2%
Tumor	0.7%	1.5%
Gyneacological problems	0.0%	3.8%
Infectious diseases	0.0%	0.6%

Source: Own data.

On the basis of their subjective judgement of their own health conditions, which serves as the basis of a general picture of health and becomes an important component of self-image, certain differences can be seen between the health status of

the Roma and non-Roma. This is similar to the results of one specific previous study and the results of other research studies as well. The differences can be seen in the less frequently mentioned illnesses such as hypertension, coronary heart disease, stomach and duodenal ulcer, eye problems.¹² On the basis of our research results it can be stated that *diseases of the circulatory and vascular system, including high blood pressure, coronary artery disease and cerebral circulatory disturbances, stomach and duodenal ulcer, eyesight problems, respiratory illnesses, asthma, and neural and psychic illnesses* appear in higher proportion among the Roma than among the non-Roma. (Fónai, Fábián, Filepné & Péntzes, 2008).

Although the morbidity data of our research in the case of heart diseases and the disorders of the vascular system is similar to that which can be found in the total population, *in addition to the higher incidence rate* we also found an *illness structure differing from the total population* in areas which are similar to those areas in Babusik's research (2005).

We also attribute this effect to structural (social situation, education, activity, income, flat conditions, settlement and school segregation, labor-market discrimination) and cultural effects (health behaviour, opinions concerning health and illness, beliefs and customs, lifestyle) and with the fact that they interact and intensify each other. Our 2003 county research also signaled significant differences in these areas between the county's Roma and non-Roma populations (Fónai, Fábián, Filepné, & Péntzes, 2008).

The mental state of the Roma was not examined within the small town Roma study, although other research studies have examined the issue.¹³ To get a better picture concerning the effects of poverty, exclusion and discrimination, the results of these studies should be mentioned. The mental state of the Roma regarding symptoms of anomie, alienation and suicidal intentions was examined by the standard questionnaire used in the Hungarian anomie and alienation research on analysing the health and the mental state of the Roma (Fónai, Péntzes, and Vitál, 2006; Fónai, Fábián, Filepné and Péntzes 2007; 2008). From among the

12 On the basis of Babusik's results taking certain disease groups into consideration, *essential differences were seen between the Roma and the whole population in the following areas: blindness and decreased vision, TB, deafness and reduced hearing, asthma, peptic ulcer, spine disorders, thyroid gland illnesses, ischaemic cardiac diseases, tumourous diseases* (Babusik, 2005).

13 The mental status of the Roma was examined in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county in 2004 (Fónai, Péntzes & Vitál, 2006; Fónai, Fábián, Filepné & Péntzes 2007, 2008) and in a small town of the county in Tiszavasvári (Fónai & Vitál, 2012). The results presented here are from the 2004 research.

mental health status indicators the ones that refer to anomie and alienation will be discussed first.

The Roma who were sampled agreed with statements indicating they experience anomie and alienation themselves much more than was reported in the course of a national study carried out in 1997. In the study's sample every fifth person (20%) suffers from serious mental problems; they feel that they are unstable, that they have almost no influence on their life, and their problems cannot be solved. This finding explains to a great degree their somatic illnesses and symptoms. One of the serious social problems reported by the Roma population is that a considerable proportion of them are unable to cope with their problems. These problems result from their underclass situation – from poverty, exclusion, segregation and discrimination – which expresses a characteristic feeling for many of the Roma. Anomie and alienation are especially high among women, which stems from Roma women's greater social disadvantages. Experiencing anomie and becoming alienated in their lives underlies the problems of their state of mind, in which spiritual, mental and somatic complaints become interwoven.

Table 18: The incidence of symptoms signaling problems of the state of mind (the distribution of "yes" responses)

Anomie and alienation	1997 county*	2004, Szabolcs-Szatmár- Bereg county, Roma sample**
Often exhausted, or upset	51.1%	52.2%
Frequent strong heartbeat	25.7%	52.6%
Always excited, nervous	21.6%	40.6%
Frequent trembling	15.3%	32.9%
Feels he/she has no luck	47.2%	57.4%
Worries a lot about his/her health	33.0%	50.3%
Feels confused if he/she has to do more activities simultaneously	22.7%	40.6%
Often severe headache	25.4%	52.4%
Is not able to get rid of his/her fears, anxieties	14.7%	36.4%

Source: *Társadalmi report (Social Report) 1998: 494, **own data (N=500).

The anomie and alienation indicators clearly underlie the indicators of the specifically poor state of mind among the Roma respondents. The "basic" experience of their life is constant excitement and exhaustion, the result of which is the high proportion of those who complain about frequent headache, strong heartbeat

and trembling. Concern about their health conditions, feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, and confusion derive directly from this state of mind and their general health perception. These mental problems are especially high among women. As a result of anomie, alienation and an unbalanced state of mind, suicide appeared in the sample as a possible method for solving problems. Every twentieth respondent (5%) was able to imagine committing suicide, with 4.1% of the men and 2.0% of the women having thought about it within the last year. Those who had attempted suicide were nearly the same proportion, with almost all of them receiving psychiatric treatment. A suicide attempt has already occurred in 6.0% of the men's families and in 3.2% of the women's families, with half of them successful. This data indicates that in the Roma population we studied, because of the problems of the high anomie and problems in their state of mind, every twenty-fifth Roma adult may consider suicide as a possible problem-solving method.

Although approximately 20% of the sampled Roma adults permanently live in a state of anomie and nearly half of them suffer from serious mental problems, this number seems to be relatively low. This data does, however, correspond to the national data.

Summary

This study investigated the life situation of the Roma population in three small towns in Hajdúság. Are there differences compared to the results of other studies? The data show that there were no significant differences between the Roma population in this study and the situation of the Roma population in other municipalities or areas. The Roma in our sample were also living in households consisting of families with many members. The floor space of their apartments is smaller than that of the non-Roma and the comfort level of the apartments is also lower, particularly relating to heating methods and infrastructure connected with running water. The educational qualifications of the sampled Roma family members are low, which significantly affects their employment level. Following from these conditions, the young age distribution of the Roma families and the high number of the dependents, family income, particularly income per capita, is very low, as their income is only about one-third of the national average. Thus, the percentage of poor people is very high in the Roma population. Due to life conditions and their income situation their health status is worse than that of the non-Roma in several areas. Finally, with the addition of exclusion and discrimination, not only do they suffer poor physical health, but their mental state is also particularly poor.

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