

The Red Sludge Took It All – Even Family Ties?

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Abstract: In this paper I would like to describe the function and changes of family ties after a traumatic experience. In my analysis I compared life story interviews, which have been recorded in two periods: one and a half month after the Hungarian red sludge disaster in 2010 and three years later. As I placed this case in Ulrich Beck's theoretical framework, named 'risk society', I had three main questions about 1) the changing of family ties after the disaster, 2) family's role in trauma procession and 3) individuals' future prospects regarding family life. This paper points out that there are definite gender differences in the individuals' family perception, and the importance of distinguishing the perceptions about immediate and distant family. Generally, no long-term changes caused by the disaster could be observed in the analysed type of family ties. I would like to point at the possibilities in family life and family ties, which can help the trauma recovery procession and which debase it. The most important result of this paper is the main role of the entire and operable family ties in coping with trauma.

Keywords: *coping with trauma; family ties; industrial disaster; red sludge disaster; risk society.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *a face față traumei; legături familiale; dezastru industrial; revărsare toxică de 'noroi roșu'; societatea riscului.*

Uncertainty in the risk society

Theories regarding the altered image of society, typical to the post-modern, western world are abundant. From these, the perception of the surrounding reality as a risk society is one of the well-known explanations. This interpretation of society was conceived by Ulrich Beck (2003), who presented post-modern society as early as in the mid eighties as a medium the particular danger of which is that every member – regardless of the traditional interpretation of classes – is exposed to risks. As a matter of fact, the level of threats facing the members of various groups differs to a certain degree. The risks affect those with a lower living standard more severely; but those of a higher status are not entirely immune either (Beck, 2003, 31). Here, the former system of class

division is replaced by a division based on lifestyle and personal phase of life, and the contrasts between those with different living standards becomes more pronounced. These contrasts are manifest not only on the personal level, but also between nations (Beck, 2003, 139-169).

Many have criticized Beck's theory of class division ever since its first publication. One of the most important debates took place between Ulrich Beck himself and Dean Curran, on the pages of *The British Journal of Sociology* in 2013 (Beck, 2013; Curran, 2013a; Curran, 2013b). In the course of the debate, Curran strives to prove that in risk society, the role of class division increases, and even introduces the concept of "risk-class". In his view, the effects and end-products of risks spread through time, and this is what enhances the importance of class division. The development of the new

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class structure is driven by the distribution of disadvantages and loss. Beck, although placing less emphasis on the examination of the class concept, criticizes Curran for overemphasising the personal risks and neglecting those coded in the system, and for not thematising the relation of the two types.

According to Beck's original theory, the usually separated emergence of the production and the effects of the risks is also a grave problem in postmodern societies. The reasons for this are the intricate causal relations and chains that characterize the structure of society, and the networks in the structure, for the understanding of which Beck recommends a systematic approach; however, to point out the person responsible for the occurrence of a threatening event is particularly difficult in such communities (Beck, 2003, 46-47). Beck's explanation for the distribution of risks also gets plenty of criticism. Olofsson et al. (2014) connect risk inequalities with the intersectional frame of thought, based on a feminist attitude. They think that Beck is wrong in emphasising the role of the individual in the distribution of risk. In their opinion, groups determined by socio-cultural attributes should be taken more expressly into consideration (groups emerging on the basis of e.g. gender, colour, age, etc.). Thus they use Beck's theory principally for the interpretation of the risks of the "oppressed groups". Another interesting approach is that of Parthasarathy (2009), who points out the difficulties of the application of Beck's theory in non-western societies. By the example of a disaster in Mumbai, India, he presents the case of an economically and industrially well-developed city, where the mechanism of the distribution of loss differs from cities of a similar status, but situated in the west. According to Parthasarathy, the organising power behind the distribution of negative effects is vulnerability. He states that the distribution of risks and coping strategies and abilities are formed by the patterns of inequalities and social discrimination. When

criticising Beck's theory on "reflexive modernization", he also stresses that the ability of reflection is not self-evident for every individual, but depends on the level of the person's social disadvantages. In his opinion, those on the – social as well as physical – fringes of society are more vulnerable, for example in the case of an environmental disaster, and so, these aspects dominate in the distribution of risks as well.

According to Beck, because of the altered structure of society, uncertainty and fear take the place of social inequality as the most important driver of community structuring (Beck, 2003, 72-73, 115-116). Losoncz (2010) digs deeper into the connections between risk and uncertainty in Beck's risk societies. He agrees with Beck's view of society in that the main difference between modern and post-modern societies is that in the latter, risks infiltrate the whole of society, affecting not only certain social groups. Parallel to this, individuals are under extreme pressure to make decisions, and because of the rapidity of the production of knowledge and the network-like quality of society, they are often forced to make decisions in matters of which they are not sufficiently experienced. These decision situations cause general uncertainty on the individual level. In post-modern societies, the gaps caused by the absence of knowledge and decision pressure widens continually. Williams and Jacobs (2011) also emphasise the interlinked nature of risk and uncertainty in our days. They, however, apply this statement not on the level of the individual (as Losoncz does), but on the national and international level, to the planning of handling future events, such as acts of terrorism.

Beck emphasises that today the heaviest weight is placed on the individual, as the traditional protective networks, formerly provided by the class structure, have disappeared. By stating this, he also stresses the independence and decision-making of the individual, as opposed to institutional

frameworks, formerly constituted by, for instance, family or education (Beck, 2003, 115-116, 134-136). By this line of thought it is easy to see that to examine post-modern, western societies it is essential to analyse individual life histories. The changes brought on by the new era are also present in the life history narrations: “typical scripts” in individual life courses, which were formerly determined by the strict belonging to a class, tend to become rare (Beck, 2003, 169, 213-214). Individuals, deprived of customary life history frameworks, are loaded with the burden of continuous self-interpretation (Beck, 2003, 248). This is underlined by the altered role, which Beck describes as “re-feudalization”. In today’s society, the role of the “comportment” of the individual is getting more important for success than the formal results, such as, for instance, education can offer in the form of a diploma. Thus it is a new challenge for the individual to accommodate to proving their aptitude by way of the effective *presentation* of their personality and abilities, instead of the more traditional “certificates” (Beck, 2003, 275-282).

Apart from the everyday uncertainties, the urge for self-interpretation becomes even more pressing in the event of a severe disaster, as it causes changes and compels the individual to clarify questions about their integration and roles. In the post-modern world, these situations need to be interpreted with an increasing frequency, as, according to the theory of risk-societies, disasters cannot be avoided or eliminated and they necessarily do happen. It is useful to bear these in mind when observing the ways in which those having experienced the red sludge disaster of 2010 interpret themselves, after having experienced first hand the above presented challenges of risk society.

Examining the red sludge disaster: questions of analysis

On 4 October 2010, in the Ajka micro-region, the red sludge disaster had devastating social and ecological consequences. Approximately one million cubic metres of strongly caustic red sludge spilled over several settlements on this autumn day. The events were followed by more than three years of settling of loss, compensation and renovation works on the settlements most severely affected. The disaster was caused by the collapse of one of the reservoir dams of the company MAL Hungarian Aluminium. The disaster also caused several losses of human life in the area.

The examination of the ecological consequences of the event started shortly after the occurrence of the tragedy. The results reveal the numerous negative ecological effects of the red sludge spill: severe damage to the arable lands of the inundated area, and the extinction of the entire ecosystem of the Torna stream, to name just those of the greatest importance. The reason for the latter was that the red sludge directly spilled into the stream, and most of it found its way to the settlements through the watercourse. Ecological consequences usually have social effects as well, so, after such an event, secondary damage also has to be taken into consideration. An example for this is the increased concentration of airborne dust, which induced fears in the locals of consequential health issues, and thus enhanced intentions of moving house. As, after the disaster, the chances of selling the houses in the area decreased, the general feeling of well-being was also diminishing in local communities due to their involuntary inability to leave.

The man-made environment of the entire flooded area was severely damaged. The value of the real properties of the directly affected – whose gardens or dwellings

were inundated by red sludge – has been assessed by the state. In case the owners did not agree with the assessment, they could ask for a repeated estimation of loss. After static analyses, it was centrally decided to demolish all the damaged buildings, and the inhabitants could choose from three courses of compensation as regards homing. Most of the damaged buildings had to be demolished – even if the red sludge impacted only the outside of the base of the house – because of the extremely strong alkaline nature of this substance, which, absorbed into the building material, could have caused static problems later on. Instead of the demolished buildings, on the basis of their value, the owners could choose from the following options: move to a used house in the same settlement, move to a used house somewhere else in the country, or move to the new residential area, built expressly for this purpose. In the case of those moving to the residential area, the government made efforts to make the new environs as familiar as possible. For this reason, the affected could choose their own plot – in order to preserve the former neighbourhood structure as much as possible, by way of “reconstruction” –, their preferred plan for the house and also the panellings.

The indirectly affected – all the inhabitants of the settlements –, however, received no compensation. After the disaster, many would have liked to leave the area, which was deemed dangerous, and the social and architectural structure of which was altered. However, most could not do this, as they did not get state funding for the removal, and the possibility of individually selling houses in the affected area was severely reduced.

The red sludge disaster had severe impacts on local society as well. Even if we only consider the damage which can be expressed in numbers, it is clear that the social effects of the disaster require special attention. In the three, most severely affected settlements –Devecser, Kolontár and Somlóvásárhely – ten people died, and

approximately 430 were injured, 262 houses were demolished, thus forcing their former inhabitants to move to different parts of the village or even the country, and two new residential areas have been established, with 87 houses in Devecser and 33 houses in Kolontár. On the whole, the red sludge induced profound changes in the lives of about 360 families. The changes of the community can be observed on several levels: family, friends, neighbourhood, and even settlement level.

As family may be regarded the most important micro-community, in the present study, I intend to show its role in the long-term aftermath of the disaster. The quality of my research method - life history interview analysis - enables us, in the course of the analyses, to form a valid picture about the state and changes of the individual's family perception and family image. In this sense, present study does not answer the rarely analysed, albeit very important question of the effects of the disaster on the entire family. By analysing the personal narratives, however, we can point to the changes, induced by the disaster, of the family ties, and of the individual's perception and estimation of the relevant persons, which reflect the modifications of the family's life.

The role of an individual in other communities is widely determined by their experience of family ties and their alterations, and the family's supportive of hindering quality regarding trauma procession. I analyse this using three questions: *How did family ties change after the disaster? What is the family's role in trauma procession? How did the disaster transform the individuals' future prospects regarding family life?*

I conducted the research for this study at two times in Devecser. The first period of data collection took place between 12 and 27 November, 2010, and the second, between 22 August and 13 November, 2013. Choosing the date of the first recording, my goal was to recognize the structure of remembering

about a fresh experience of traumatic event. My later analysis about the interpretation of the narratives, was supported by the spectacle of the aggrieved environment and old, aggrieved homes, in this period. As the identification of the directly affected was extremely difficult in the first recording period, I selected the members for my sample using the snowball method (Babbie, 2003, 206-207). A second round of interviewing was very important for me, because I wanted to analyse the social changings of a long-term, longitudinal perspective: how can the fresh trauma and afterwards the processed trauma, be imbedded into the whole life story's structure. Summer of 2013 was an ideal time to record them, because of the multiannual renovation works, what caused that lots of the aggrieved people could move into their new homes only in the spring of 2012. Therefore in the summer of 2013 all of the interviewees spent at least a whole year in their new houses, thus can be presumed that to get used to it, or maybe they can consider it as a real home. In the second round of interviews, I applied the same snowball method, because the representativity was not necessary in my qualitative analysing viewpoint. I endeavoured to have a few interviewees with whom I could talk in both sampling periods, because their cases are particularly useful to observe the long-term process of coping with trauma. In 2013 I had the opportunity to contact three persons of my former interviewees. In the first set, I conducted 14 life history interviews¹, and three years later, 11². In the course of my interviews, I looked for people directly affected in the first place, and in 2013, I tried to interview persons from all the newly formed groups, namely, those who stayed in Devecser but moved to the new residential area, those who moved to used houses in other parts of the town, and those who left the town. In my research, I also contacted some indirectly affected people³, as their narrative shed light on some typical features expressly connected to the narra-

tives of the directly affected. In the course of my research, I studied middle aged and elderly inhabitants, their ages varying between 33 and 73 years. I analysed the recorded material along the three questions introduced above, with qualitative content analysis.

The presence of the family in disaster research

Parallel to the increasing number of natural and industrial disasters in the 20th century, sociological disaster research also began to gain momentum in the second half of the century (Perry, 2007). These surveys typically focus on the individual or the entire society; family as a research unit, or the exploration of the effects of disasters on family ties are less prominent. Several studies call attention to this shortcoming in scientific literature (Reid and Reczek, 2011, 1397-1418; Lowe et al., 2012; Botey and Kulig, 2014, 1471-1483), seeing that marital and other family relationships are affected by the traumatic experience of a family member. And when an entire family experiences such events, the changes become especially significant.

Researchers began to investigate the effects of traumatic experiences on families in the first half of the 20th century, but research dealing expressly with disasters started only later. In the 1930s, some family sociological studies did examine the family's role in stress situations and the procession of traumatic events. At first, these research projects primarily dealt with the period of the "Great Depression". Later, in the 1940s, urged by the Second World War, studies also began to explore the effects of war. In the 1950s, family research expanded with the addition of fresh topics, such as alcoholism, illness, and the problems of the parental duties. Sociologists began paying attention to the matter of disasters also in this era. Here,

Crawford's name is worth mentioning, who, by means of a tornado in Texas in 1957, undertook to distinguish the types of damages, caused by disasters, that affect families the most severely. He concluded that merely material damage did not have lasting negative effects on the affected, while severe domestic problems (such as the serious injury or even loss of a close relative because of the disaster, or the drastic transformation of family functioning) did. By this, he underlined the importance of observing these aspects in disaster research. In the 1960s, in family sociology research, interest for disasters dropped. The range of studied subjects broadened again in the 1970s, with the addition, for example, of the analysis of the effects of drugs and violence. As regards disaster research, a new line came up front: namely, analyses also taking long-term effects into consideration. In this period, highly influential research projects were carried out, for example, Kai T. Erikson's (1976) study concerning the mud spill in Buffalo Creek. From the 1980s, disaster research became fixed in works examining the relationships between families and stress situations. At this time, new subjects emerged in family sociological studies, which are getting an increasing amount of attention to this day, such as divorce, or the problems of single-parent families. Studies where the research unit is the family itself, and not the individual, are relatively scarce concerning these subjects as well (I-Chio, 1991, 289-334).

As I mentioned above, relevant literature presents the relation of disasters and family functioning mainly by describing demographical changes, or social processes on higher levels and statistical data. Several such research works can be found, concerning various types of disasters. For example, a study showing the alterations of the population and family planning after the Chernobyl nuclear explosion (Lokiza-Szacsuk and Omel'Janec, 1991, 216-221), or another, exploring the changes of household

structures after Hurricane Katrina (Randell, 2011, 654-668). Several studies describe the transformation of local communities, and the appearance of the collective trauma in these communities, in the case of the recent Indonesian tsunami (Frankenberg et al., 2012, 498-514), or after a murder at an American settlement. (Wicke and Cohen Silver, 2009, 233-248) The most comprehensive sociological analysis about the Hungarian red sludge disaster to date explores the effects of the disaster at the affected settlements, but even this volume does not pay special attention to the micro-level representation of the structural changes of family ties. (Bartal and Ferencz, 2015).

Besides the description of effects on the societal level, the other prevalent viewpoint focuses on the individual level. These research works analyse questions that are more relevant in the setting of psychology or social work. The authors of these studies are concerned, with remarkable frequency, with the presentation of the influences pertaining to children, such as the ways parents help their children's mental healing after a disaster (Hafstad and Haavind, 2012, 293-302). Several studies deal with post-traumatic stress, which appears after traumatic events, and its effects on the family (e.g. McDermott and Cobham, 2012). One analysis conducted on the individual level is, for example, analysing the Hurricane Katrina's long-term effects on the happiness levels of single women. It shows how, with the passing of time, the happiness of the individual was influenced by whether they have lost a family member in the disaster (Calvo et al., 2014).

Apart from the results cited above, the analyses of Hurricane Katrina also point out how a disaster may affect marital and other family relationships (Reid and Reczek, 2011, 1397-1418; Lowe et al., 2012).

Results – Families after the red sludge spill

In my study, my purpose is to present the special characteristics of the two examination periods regarding the effects of the disaster on the individual's family perception. Then, comparing these periods, I seek to explore long-term processes as well. This purpose fills a hole in the range of studies for two reasons: 1) as yet, no longitudinal analysis has been conducted on the micro-level, for the representation of the red sludge disaster; and 2) as mentioned above, besides the presentation of the individual experiences, I also aim to represent the changes of the family as a micro-community, caused by the disaster. Such undertakings are also scarce in disaster research.

Based on the texts of the interviews, some points need clarification. The most important one is the definition of the concept of *family*, based on the interviewees' interpretation. In the life histories, the word "family" takes on two broad, definitely separable meanings. As in everyday usage, the term here also may refer to *immediate, close relatives* (parents, children, spouse, siblings), or *distant relatives*. Immediate family members are mentioned by the precise relation (e.g. "my husband", "my elder daughter", "my father"), while distant relatives are mentioned as a general category (e.g. "relatives", "the entire family"). So, distant relatives are usually not differentiated based on their roles in the family, but in some cases – typically when immediate family is either absent or the relationships with them are deficient –, the interviewees do highlight some important persons. The circle of distant relatives usually covers aunts, uncles, and cousins. It is an important characteristic of the family concept of the interviews that more distant relatives (e.g. second cousins, great-grandparents, cousins of the parents) are hardly ever mentioned, and godparents and "fictive

kins" are absent. Fictive kins are strangers regarded as family. Their roles are usually temporary, and because of this, also peculiar: these ties often offer stronger support and hold less conflict – and thus are often considered more important – than actual blood ties. This is partly because new-found connections are not burdened with former controversies and conflicts, so they are able to play a more expressly positive, supportive role. On the other hand, the same way as the connection was formed, it can also be ended at any time, and this gives a sense of security for both parties. A study examining an American disaster accurately describes the characteristics of such "kinship" ties, and also shows examples to the appearance of "adopted" siblings, "adopted" grandmothers and grandfathers. These ties are usually formed between affected persons, shortly after the disaster. It may be based on former, loose acquaintance, or may appear between total strangers (Reid and Reczek, 2011, 1397-1418). There is no real explanation for the absence of fictive kins in my data, but this feature doubtlessly is an important difference from the American case of Hurricane Katrina, represented in literature. This form of ties has great supportive power, and so is able to promote trauma procession. It may be supposed that the social capital, family concept, and overall confidence level of the black Americans – the subjects of Reid and Reczek's study – basically differed from those of my interviewees. As a consequence, among the inhabitants of Devecsér, the persons referred to by the term "family" form rather a close circle. In the following, we will use the two separate interpretations of the term, and we will see the role played by both in the individual recollections.

Changes of family ties after the disaster

From all the communities that a person is part of (such as neighbourhood, religious communities, village community), the role of the family is unquestionably the most important. This was supported by my interviews of both 2010 and 2013. A remarkable indication of this was that the most important factor influencing the overall sense of well-being of the individuals was the happy or unhappy quality of their family lives, or its mere presence or absence in their lives.

This statement is supported by how, in the individual's opinion, family ties were restructured directly after the mud spill. The changes taking place in the families are easy to observe, as this is one of the subjects discussed in most detail in the interviews: in every one of the 14 life histories recorded in 2010, *family* is present as one of the most important values. At the top of the value chart, besides family, other traditional values appear, such as work, health, and general social order.

When disaster struck, the first reaction, according to all of the interviews, was connecting. In most cases, the affected attempted to reach their immediate relatives. As the members of my sample group were middle-aged, and many of them experienced the disaster together with their spouses, in their own homes, most of them recounted having informed their adult children about what had happened. In case the spouse was not present, he/she was the first person whom the affected person tried to contact. After this, apart from this type of connecting, personal family ties also became tighter, as shown by the fact that the help received from relatives, the unity of the close and distant family are among the most often recurring, main motives of nearly all of the narratives. There are contradictory results in scientific literature: Bartal and Ferencz (2015, 160) state that the

affected from Devecser required more organised help precisely because of their weak family networks. This apparent contradiction between our results may have several causes. For one, the methodology of the two studies differed greatly, as Bartal and Ferencz used primarily quantitative data, collected with the survey method, with a sample size of several hundreds, as opposed to my own, qualitative analysis. Besides this, the thematical focuses of the two studies also differ greatly. The most important aim of Bartal and Ferencz was to conduct an examination of the effects of the disaster which has its primary focus not on the accounts of the experiences of the affected, but on a thorough investigation of the operations of governmental and non-governmental organisations helping them, and their results. In my research, however, quotations like the one below prove the existence and importance of family ties, which also played an important role when settling the losses.

“We immediately called my daughter. She said she would come home and help. I told her to stay, you can't help anyway. (...) My son also worked a lot. He really did help a lot. Worked here from dawn to dusk.” (2010. Woman, age 53, one adult daughter lives in Budapest, lives with her husband and adult son, retired soldier).⁴

“The interesting thing was, that from afar, cousins too, who live in Pest, Cserzeg, and the other end of the country, they called, said they would come.” (2010. Woman, age 54, married, three adult sons, one of them lives with her with his family, shop assistant)

Similarly to the above excerpts, most of the interviews report that, directly after the event, visits and help from adult children became more frequent. In many cases children living far, at different towns, started for the area the minute they heard what had happened.

Parallel to the positive development of family relations, another process can also be observed from the texts. This is the problem of the increasing frequency of quarrels and tensions in the immediate family. The following interview excerpts provide examples to this:

“At the beginning, it was very interesting, at that time everybody was very patient and calm. At that time, we used to talk nicely to each other. My husband changed, and I have too. Now we are more irritable.” (2010. Woman, age 54, married, three adult sons, one of them lives with her with his family, shop assistant).

“After two weeks, my daughter came home from Pest with her husband. Crying, fighting, there was everything. Because she said we had to get rid of everything. (As opposed to interviewee, who would have liked to keep her old utensils.) (...) As I say, crying and all that, nothing else but that.” (2010. Woman, age 66, widow, two adult children live separately, after the disaster she moved in with her third adult daughter and her family, retired, besides works as book-keeper).

Later on in my study, we will see that as time passes, another type of tension appears, which arises from moving in with adult children. At this point, we call attention to the type of tension caused by the disturbance of the former daily order. This means that the life-style of the directly affected changed entirely not only because their homes and their surroundings became ruined, and so they were forced to move out either immediately or later, but also because, after the event, the immediate family spent an increased amount of time locked up together. The many immediate and involuntary decision situations – which were, in most cases, characterised by the uncertainty mentioned in the Introduction –, and the increased amount of time spent together made the ties between close family members more strained.

So, directly after the disaster, two processes started in the families of the affected: 1) a *positive* tendency regarding distant relatives; and 2) a *negative* tendency in the immediate family. The *positive* changes manifested in the rekindling of distant family relations. This was present in two ways, a) connecting by *communication*; and b) in the form of *activities*. The first meant that phone calls became more frequent and distant relatives showed increased general interest for the affected. Activities principally comprised help with the cleaning and reconstruction works around the house. *Negative* tendencies in immediate families became perceptible in the significantly increased number of quarrels and tensions, because of closer contact and more time spent together. These conflicts were boosted by the many decision situations which followed the disaster, and which had fundamental consequences for the later life conditions of the affected. The most important of these, obviously, was choosing the type and location of the new home, but decision situations concerning the utilization of the aids, or the administration about the house insurance also became common after the disaster. In most of these cases, the affected inhabitants' situation was aggravated by the fact that the decisions had to be made extremely quickly.

In a few years, the characteristics altered remarkably compared to the conditions of 2010. In 2013, it became clear that in the long run, generally neither the immediate nor the distant family ties changed, when compared to the family structure existent before the disaster, according to the narrations. To put it briefly, we see that pre-disaster patterns of family ties were restored. A number of studies report similar processes after severe traumas caused by disasters (Calvo et al., 2014; I-Chiao, 1991). This process is present in the interview texts even in the cases when the interviewee deemed that family ties had been poor even before the disaster, as we can see from the excerpt below:

“I expected that now I’m in this situation, they (her elder brother) will contact me. I heard that my brother’s wife told my elder daughter that she tried to contact me. But I didn’t pick up the phone. It may have happened, as during the treatments you can’t use the phone, you cannot. They do things sterilized. I don’t think they called. Our team broke up way before this.” (2013. Woman, age 64, divorced, lives alone, two adult daughters live separately, pensioner).

“No, it’s the same. (The family relations. The interviewee formerly recounted that she had poor relationships with her siblings since childhood) Nobody. My brothers and sisters did not come at all to see how we were. A’s relatives didn’t come either, to see if we’re afraid, what happened to us, are we safe. Nothing. We stayed the same. Nothing changed. There are those who think you can get rich from this. They don’t know what’s going on here.” (2013. Roma woman, age 33, married, three underage children live with her, housewife).

At the same time, in the cases when family relationships had been satisfactory before the disaster, the interviewees describe the relations unchanged, or even stronger, better. For instance, a male interviewee, age 55, who works at the town management, talked throughout the entire interview frequently about family unity and good atmosphere having always been important values for him. At one point, he explicitly emphasised how proud it made him that his children’s situation was much better than that of most of their generation, as he and his wife have not divorced. Regarding the decision situations arising in the wake of the disaster, he emphasised all along that all important matters, for example the location of their new house, had been decided together by the entire family. When asked whether anything changed in their family relations, he answered that nothing did, for, as earlier, their relationship has remained balanced and good

after the disaster as well. Similar situations are outlined in the excerpts below:

“It is the same as before. (...) ...when we moved, the entire family was here. But we did need their help for that, because we packed it all up. But, thank God, nothing changed with us. Or shall I put it this way: there was nothing the disaster could change.” (2013. Woman, age 54, one adult daughter lives separately, lives with partner, works at a hatchery).

“Thank be to God, there are no problems. Indeed, I think everyone became stronger. The children care more for each other. If they here a siren or anything of the sort, everyone comes: you here, you OK? Only grew stronger.” (Roma woman, age 33, married, three underage children live with her, housewife).

There were some cases where the interviewee described very good, supportive pre-disaster family relationships, which deteriorated after the event. In every instance, these problems arose in the immediate family (spouse, child, sibling); the relationship patterns in the distant family were re-established in every case. For one of my interviewees, to whom I had the opportunity to talk in both recording periods, in 2010, her husband and three grown children meant the most important support, and she found a possible way of processing the negative psychological effects of the disaster in activities concerning her children and grandchildren. All the positive elements of her future prospects were related to them. After three years, however, she talks about the state of her family ties as follows:

“It (money) wouldn’t have been scarce, if we had agreed to go out to the residential area. But my husband said he won’t even stay in Devecser, not to mention going to the new residence. He was so determined. I couldn’t change this. I was begging him. (...) But he said he didn’t want any other used house, either. He decided that we

leave Devecser. (...) I feel that I used to have a place in life somewhere, which I now don't have." (2013. Woman, age 58, married, three adult sons, lives with husband and the family of a son, farmer).

On the basis of my texts, there are two general causes in the background, in situations like this. One of them, as illustrated in the excerpt above, is the case when one of the family members makes *single-person decisions*, usually concerning the location of the new home. The other type we encountered may be termed deterioration of family ties brought about by *material causes*. In this case, following the event, the affected person sees the corruption of some ties in the immediate family because of an experience of unfairness when sharing the remnants after the disaster. In the case of one of the interviewees, a retired woman, a quite unexpected thing happened: she trusted her adult child with several pieces of furniture, to keep safe until the new home became fit for occupation. However, later, she did not get them back, so she felt like having been robbed by an immediate relative, and therefore the relationship deteriorated. Another interviewee also mentioned a family problem along these lines:

"Since the disaster, I don't even speak with my sister. My relationship with them is not good. Because they took all the money." (2013. Man, age 53, single, childless, pensioned off, makes a living from black labour).

In some cases, however, the interviewees recount positive tendencies. As this was typically observed in the case of men, we regard this as a phenomenon determined by gender. In the background, there are tasks that at the time of or shortly after the disaster led to substantial changes in the lives of the affected, providing new challenges and opportunities for success. From the excerpts below we see that various changes may cause this effect. It may be, for instance, a

new workplace, or the unexpected return of a child, removed earlier, at the time of a divorce. A common characteristic of these is that they fundamentally influence the former lifestyle of the affected person, and thus mitigate the all-determining and all-changing quality of the disaster. In the excerpts below, the interviewees describe the phenomenon as follows:

"...family relations definitely grow stronger. My pals tell me I don't care for them enough. I have my own life, I try to catch up with myself, with the construction works, the kid's stuff is for me to do (his 18-year-old daughter moved in with him after the disaster), not for the family." (2013. Man, age 47, divorced, one adult daughter lives with him, retired soldier).

"They help. The family was united. To a degree, we are now strong in this respect. We are able to undertake large programmes, because I can count on four people for sure (wife and two adult sons, living with him, also involved in the new business). (...) I always look to the future. I love to play 'chess' and I'm always 3-5 steps ahead. They hate this in the family, because there are things they don't understand, why was something necessary? I tell them, you will see later." (2013. Man in his forties, married, two adult sons live with him, restaurant owner, businessman).

We can see how our two research periods outline the temporal elements from the effects of the traumatic event on the assessment of family ties. In summary, 1) for the majority of the interviewees, the experienced shock did not lead to substantial changes in the family relationship patterns. 2) The unexpected event strained the immediate family relations – especially of those living in the same household – heavily, in a short period of time, by disrupting the daily routine and upsetting the order. 3) The more distant family ties played an important role in the emergency situation following the disaster, acting

as a quickly and easily mobilizable social capital, but, after order was re-established, the intensity of these returned to the level of the former, relaxed conditions. 4) We can see that after the arrangement of housing, and later, the re-establishment of a daily routine similar to that of the pre-disaster lifestyle, the increased tension experienced within the immediate family has relaxed. An exception from this is the situation of those who still had unresolved conflicts – mainly arising from material causes –, despite the settling of living conditions.

The family's role in trauma procession

Family, as the most important micro-community, plays an essential role in the promotion or hindering of trauma procession. Factors such as the family's mere presence or absence after the disaster, or the possible existence of prominent, especially influential family members have fundamental effects on the recovery processes of the affected. In the following, we are going to examine how this function of the family appears, and, later, changes.

From the interviews conducted in 2010, the trauma processing strategies applied by the affected already begin to take form. Regarding these, family has two determinant roles. One of the means by which family can promote trauma procession is through *action for others*. This gives a purpose for the affected persons, makes them feel useful. This is essential as, through losing their homes, one of the most secure points of their former lives disappeared, and in its absence, they continuously need the help of others. This undermines their sense of personal independence, and, because of their defencelessness, the range of activities which enable them to experience their capability to care for themselves gets reduced. In a state like

this, the presence of people to whom the affected can provide some help is an important means of recovery. That is why we learned from several interviews that many of the affected took part – even for months – in the caritative, assisting, or reconstruction works. Similarly, most of the interviewees regard their family members as important handholds, and as such, a kind of “resource”. As my interviews were conducted among middle-aged and elderly affected persons, they most often return the support they had received by visiting and helping their adult children and grandchildren, and, consequently, their sense of usefulness also increases. About the way this provides a new purpose in the traumatized situation, and the help it offers, the interviewees talked as follows:

“So not for ourselves, but we have to fight again for my son's future. I'm not fighting for myself.” (2010. Woman, age 54, married, three adult sons, one of them lives with her with his family, shop assistant).

“It will be so nice now, because I want to visit my daughter in Pest. Then I want to go to my son. (...) Then I told her, that I will economize. Now they are waiting for me too. The poor soul works all day, no vacation, she can't come. (...) Now we can go better. We are calming down a bit. Go, go, see the grandchildren.” (2010. Woman, age 69, lives separately from three adult children with partner, retired).

The other important role of the family in trauma procession is the presence of a *strong personality* in the family of the affected. From most of the interviews we see that this role is usually taken by the partner – husband or life-partner – of the women I talked to. This man contributes to trauma procession principally by providing emotional support and help with the decisions, and, consequently, by mitigating the interviewees' uncertainties after the disaster. Female interviewees quoted below talked about this:

“Then (when her husband could come home from hospital after three weeks) it was much easier for me, because we did things, the two of us. (...) He was happy that after all there was a furnished flat. Then these bureaucratic things were off my shoulders, thank God. He managed everything. I only had to cook and wash. For me things became much easier then. It was good that he came home.” (2010. Woman in her fifties, lives separately from two adult daughters with her husband, pensioned off, but works in husband’s business).

“As a matter of fact it was that my husband took things very much in hand. He was very strong-minded. After the first panic. Because he panicked too, what will happen now. But then he got back to his senses very soon, saying that his leg was already bandaged, so things can’t be that bad now. It was he that kept our spirit up, that we will solve it, we will do this and we will do that, we can save this and we can save that. Everything will be alright. It was he, rather. He is very practical.” (2010. Woman, age 53, married, lives together with adult son and separately from adult daughter, housewife).

The above excerpts also show that classical family roles emerged and strengthened. We can observe from the texts of the interviews that after the disaster, in other domains as well, *traditional gender roles* became more expressed (e.g. labour division in the family), making more clear for the affected the appropriate attitudes, the roles to play in human relationships, and the tasks that go with them. Obviously, this process deserves our attention when discussing the family, because the majority of gender roles are expressed in this community. A solid, well-defined gender role also contributes to trauma procession. The most typical manifestation of this in my interviews, for men, is that they regarded it their own duty – so their motivation became stronger – to get

their families existentially back on their feet. In the case of women, the enhanced importance of gender identity was marked by the frequent mentioning and emphasising of the roles of mother and supporter of family cohesion. These roles, in turn, provided women with a purpose that helped them find their place after the disaster. One of the interviewees on this topic:

“I know I have to be very strong in my family here. Despite my having sons and a husband. Despite this, I am the mother and I have to hold this family together. I am the mother. (pause) Everything goes on. I try to reassure myself. And my surroundings. (pause) There’s nothing else for me to do.” (2010. Woman, age 60, married, housewife).

Emphasising the woman identity seems a successful “strategy”, up to the point when, because of the uncertainties of housing, parents decide to move in with their adult children, into the child’s home. From the analyses of the interviews of 2013, we see that several people chose this possibility for the months it took for the new homes for the affected to be completed, instead of moving into lodgings. Our analysis implies that trauma procession of the interviewees who chose this solution is severely backward. Other authors came to similar results, after conducting a longitudinal study for two years after Hurricane Katrina (Reid and Reczek, 2011). In my own research, we reach this conclusion because those who moved in with their children instead of seeking independent housing solutions (such as moving into lodgings or a holiday home) for the time they were not yet able to use their new homes, talked more expansively and in more detail about this period, indicating its carrying more weight in their case. On the other hand, those who chose an independent housing solution – as apparent from the quotes below – talked about this period briefly, recounting mere data, attaching less

overall significance to it. In their narratives, this topic did not return again.

“Then we moved to digs in the A. street. We lived there till 8 July. That’s when we got the house. We didn’t have to spend much time in digs. That was a transitional time.” (2013. Woman, age 54, one adult daughter lives separately, lives with partner, works at a hatchery).

“I took a 28 square meter, small attic flat on Ó. Sqaure (Veszprém). Old, wrought-iron stairs, like four floors high. I came downstairs once or twice a day. I took care of myself.” (2013. Woman, age 64, divorced, lives alone, two adult daughters live separately, pensioner).

As opposed to this, in the case of those who went to live with their children before moving into their new homes, the narrative often and lengthily dwells on this period. According to my research, the relationship with the child did not deteriorate in these families, either. This situation, however, where, in total contrast to the parental role, middle-aged and elderly people were forced to live at their children’s place and were reduced to their children’s help, further increased their experience of defencelessness and failure, which are in any case prevalent after a disaster. Those in this situation, however, tried to return the help their children gave them, striving for reciprocity (e.g. by undertaking cooking or other chores), but they did their best to get out of this situation in every case. We can see this from the excerpts below. From the former parts of the first quoted interview, it was apparent that the interviewee had a very good relationship with her daughter’s family and their time spent together remained a pleasant memory. However, she mentions several times that when her daughter wanted to care for her, “serve her”, for instance to take over the cooking, the housekeeping, or, as quoted, when they wanted her to stay on even after the completion of her new home, she was

always trying, within the bounds of possibility, to escape from the role of the “one under care”. This caused no conflicts in the family, but the narrator still often implied that, as for her, her former, independent lifestyle was the norm, she was trying to return to it as soon as possible.

“I was so tired. Here (in the new house) I have everything, why should I go wandering? Now my place is there, now I am able to live there. My son-in-law says: mother, stay here for May, don’t go yet. – Of course I’m not staying, it is tiring to get down there from here on foot.” (2013. Woman, age 70, widow, two adult daughters and one adult son live separately, pensioner).

“Then we had a room at my daughter’s place. They live here in Devecser, the mud didn’t reach them. (...) But it was awkward. Earlier, they lived with us. Then they moved out, well, to have their own flat.” (...) *“It was not good, living at my daughter’s. It wasn’t the same for them either. But they heartily, I can’t say a bad word, only I felt that I had my own and now I’m forced – I have worked all my life, lived hard, did everything I could, just to have it. And now everything is gone. There is nothing.”* (2013. Woman, age 55, married, two adult children live separately, pensioner, besides works in catering).

In the interviews of 2013, we can see that those who moved in with their children, spent two to three times as much time there before moving into their new homes as those who solved their temporary housing differently. The affected spent an average of 2 to 3 months in lodgings, whereas those who moved in with their children spent more than half a year in this situation.

Apart from the fact that the upsetting of the parent–child roles led to repeated tensions and negative experiences, the time of trauma procession was also protracted by that the affected in such situations felt their need for the help of others for a longer

time, and this “unnatural” situation reminded them more often of the consequences of the disaster. Besides this, in cases when the affected have the possibility to live in a self-supporting way again, and to cope with the difficulties of housing on their own, these tasks provide a new challenge for them after the disaster, and thus promote, if not quite forgetting what happened, at least the procession of it. Whereas those who had moved in with their children, once it was possible to move to their new homes, had to cope anew with being alone, or even lonesome. A subsequent part of the narration of the above interviewee describes the difficulties of this situation:

“It was very bad. I missed them because I got used to them. I lived there for six months. It was really bad to be alone, and it was strange.” (2013. Woman, age 70, widow, two adult daughters and one adult son live separately, pensioner).

We can observe a fundamental difference between the trauma processing strategies of men and women. The state of trauma procession in 2013 was definitely gender specific. This is in agreement with the results of former disaster research (Enarson et al., 2007; Reid and Reczek, 2011). Scientific literature reports that in such cases, women establish more human ties based on care (e.g. mental or material support) either received from or given to others, and also cultivate them more efficiently. Thus, interpersonal tensions arising from these are also more prevalent among women (Reid and Reczek, 2011). In the case of the affected persons of Devecser, by 2013 we can observe that men have made better progress in the procession of the negative effects of the event. Three years after the disaster the interviews show the various features the two genders experience as help from the immediate family, the things that help their trauma procession. The two attitudes, the two different ways of observing the family’s role as a resource could be

termed “*family as a purpose*” for the men, while “*family as a means*” for the women. The individual who regards family as a purpose, when mentioning immediate family members or members of their household in the life history narrations, relates to them experiencing a traditional male role; the role of breadwinner and the emotional supporting of others gets a prominent position.

Here, we refer back to a former observation, namely, that in 2010 we already regarded caring for others as a means suitable for supporting trauma procession. From this result, we conclude that after a disaster, the inclusion of the affected into as broad a range of the helping activities as possible would undoubtedly be important, as this activity would promote their personal recovery as well. Especially for men, this strategy could work well in the recovery process because, from the disastrous event itself, they have continuous opportunity to stabilize the overturned circumstances of their family, to improve the situation effectively and spectacularly. The case of a male interviewee in his forties, who lost his business in the disaster, provides an example for this experiencing of the traditional male role – that of the breadwinner. He recounts that when he once again achieved success at his workplace in his new business, the strained relationships in his family also began to relax, and his own feeling of well-being improved. In the case of a 55-year-old man, the case is similar: the majority of the narrative consists of stories about work. This man leads his own store, practices viticulture, and also holds a high position at the Devecser town management. He recounted that for him, the enormous amount of work he carried out in order to promote the recovery process of his family and to insure their future was the thing that most effectively helped trauma procession. A third instance, the formerly quoted, 47-year-old, divorced interviewee throughout the entire interview recounted that by that time, he had been able to process the shock caused

by the mud spill. His statement is firmly established, as he got used to his new home, felt at home in it, successfully settled into his new neighbourhood, and looked into the future with confidence. From the entire text of the interview, it was clearly visible that his primary goal was to provide a suitable home and living conditions for her young adult daughter, who has moved in with him two years earlier. As formerly, for about fifteen years, he had been living on his own, the presence of a new family member, for whom he could provide support in the wake of the disaster, provided him with the possibility of experiencing the classical male function by a new role, that of the father.

In the case of women, on the other hand, family is more the “means of re-discovered happiness”. Among them, trauma procession was more successful for those who received enough support from the family. From the immediate family, they principally expect help with the decisions and practical activities, time spent together, and emotional support. When these are granted, trauma procession becomes more successful. If we observe the family functions which mean support for the two genders in this way, we can see that the two complement each other well. From this, we assume that the partners can promote each other’s trauma procession most successfully in those families where the classical gender roles had been accepted by the parties also before the disaster – we discussed above that by 2013, in most of the cases, pre-disaster relationship patterns have been re-established –, and where these roles have strengthened by approximately the same degree for both parties. This assumption, however, cannot be proved on the basis of my interviews, as from 2013, I have no recordings of both members of a married couple.

Independently from social gender, trauma procession tends to be more successful where *communication* intensifies in the immediate family, as also seen by Lowe et al.

(2012). To put it shortly, it helps when family members talk about the event. The other not gender-specific factor which seems to be the most influential is the mere presence or absence of family in the life of the affected. Family, then, may be described as the main protecting factor of the affected, and loneliness, as the most harmful state after the disaster. Essentially, the presence or absence of family ties is the basis for successful or unsuccessful social integration. This is illustrated by the case of one of my interviewees. Before the mud spill, he lived with her mother; he never married or had children. His relationship with his sister had been poor even before the event, his contact with his distant relatives was scarce: these relatives live far from him and they rarely get in touch; he only received substantial help from a cousin after the tragedy. His mother died half a year after the disaster. At this period, the man had a girlfriend, who broke up with him, and at the same time, his relationship with his sister also severely deteriorated because of the inheritance. These negative experiences, after the disaster, reinforcing each other, led to deviant behaviour (he damaged the door of his ex-girlfriend’s house), and he was sent to prison. After having done his time, he would have needed support from his family, but even at the time of the interview, he was forbidden by authority to leave Devecser. Because of this, it was hopeless for him to get to his cousin. The neighbourhood tried to support this man (e.g. with food, frequent questions about his condition), but still, in his case, presumably the absence of family has led to further problems. During the interview, he voices this problem several times over in several different ways; in this excerpt, for example, as follows:

“Now I can’t find myself. This is my only problem. I had a girlfriend, I messed up with her too. I could have managed to get along with her somehow too. The only problem is that alone this whole thing

here is strange. There is nobody I can talk to." (2013. Man, age 53, single, childless, pensioned off, makes a living from black labour).

The individuals' future family prospects

The last question of our analysis examined whether, as a consequence of the disaster, the future family prospects of the affected had changed, and if they did, to what effect. Here again we can distinguish the typical characteristics of the short and the long term, regarding middle-aged and elderly affected persons.

From the analysis of the interviews of 2010, a single important feature can be drawn; this one, however, is present in every interview. We have already concluded above that the help which an affected person can render to not affected relatives within the immediate family often provides a purpose to the individual, and thus promotes trauma procession. The individual future prospects outlined shortly after the trauma are still very unstable, and are usually characterised by negative emotions, hopelessness and uncertainty. Basically, in the majority of the narrations, there is only one steady point which gives sense to any future plans, and this concerns the family. So family – the immediate family – appears as a purpose. The recovery of the family provides motivation in the various decision situations, such as selecting the new home. When considering this question, the affected often opted for the possibility closest to their grown-up children, or the dwelling which later will be the most serviceable for supporting them or helping out with the grandchildren. Another goal is also recurrent in the future prospects: the parents wish to support their adult children materially as well.

The more substantial results, however, can be traced from the interviews of 2013. In the future prospects of this time, after the settling of the housing conditions and the restoration of daily order, regarding family, typically the former, pre-disaster goals return. When the interviewees were asked about their prospects for the future, their pre-disaster plans and aims appeared as wishes that could still be realized after three years. These wishes, in the majority of cases, did not comprise great changes, instead they usually concerned making a good living, and sustaining, supporting and holding together family and home. In the excerpts below, I quote the answers of some of the interviewees to my question concerning their prospects and plans about the future:

"We are building the house we had planned back then, how it all should be. We have the plan of it, it is only delayed by three years, because earlier there was neither means nor time. (...) Even now, we are building a wood-shed, its plans have been ready these ten years." (2013. Man in his forties, married, two adult sons live with him, restaurant owner, businessman).

"I think that now, after the mud, everyone has returned to their own little tracks. We try to make a living the same way, as long as we can. My partner goes out (To Austria to work, as before the disaster). From that. We had no financial aid at all." (2013. Roma woman, age 33, married, three underage children live with her, housewife).

So, in this field, there are no great changes compared to the pre-disaster state, no former plans about weddings, children, or divorces are cancelled, and neither does the number of such plans increase. In literature, we find several studies with contrasting conclusions. (Wicke and Cohen Silver, 2009; Lakiza-Szacsuk and Omel' Janec, 1991) Lakiza-Szacsuk – Omel' Janec, for example, when describing the situation following the

Chernobyl nuclear explosion, report that the disaster caused secondary damage in family life and the plans and future prospects regarding it, manifest in the increasing number of planned or effected divorce, because of the infertility caused by the radiation in many couples. The reason for this difference in our results may lie in the demographic composition of my sample; namely, that the participants were already past the dating and child bearing phases of their family lives.

In the cases where, in the years following the disaster, the development of family relationships showed a negative tendency, despite previous good relationships with immediate family members, the future prospects are also remarkably negative. This is accompanied by general dissatisfaction. The sense of hopelessness and dissatisfaction is not limited to subjects concerning the family, it is typical to all prospects about the future. This is principally manifest in the affected person's life being "stranded", in the sense that they have neither short- nor long-term plans for the future. Here, we refer back to our former statement that family only helps trauma procession for women if they get enough support (on the spiritual, mental, and practical level), while for men, if there is someone they can support. We find more expressly negative future prospects in the cases when the affected individuals had no such opportunities. We recall the case of that 53-year-old man, mentioned earlier, who lost his mother, and then also his girlfriend shortly after the disaster, and his relationship with his sister also deteriorated. We saw that the absence of the family, the loneliness not only hindered trauma procession, but also lead to secondary traumas. If we observe his future prospects, we see that he does not have real plans, but instead mere "wishes". In the excerpt below, this is clear from his using the conditional all the time when talking about his future plans, be it employment, a new partner, or moving. From the interview, we find out that his financial possibilities are

very limited, that he has no real property of his own, so it is impossible for him to move away. After the mud spill, he even spent some time in prison, and because of this, he became further hindered in his leaving Devecser. The most often mentioned, serious problem in his narrative, however, is loneliness, as he has no supportive family behind him, and he is not an integrated member of any other community, either.

"It would be the easiest if there was a job here. If I had a girlfriend, with whom I could talk, live my life. This way it is all boring (...). If I could find a lady like that, then my life would also be easier. The relation is different then, as here."

In another passage, he talks about the future:

"I have a plan of getting married, so seeking a life partner. And a job. This is my prospect (...). I would leave here. I don't like this barrenness. When I look outside, my heart aches. I know that the parental house used to stand there. I don't want to see it anymore, that it was there. It still hurts. The wounds have not healed so much that you could see it." (2013. Man, age 53, single, childless, pensioned off, makes a living from black labour).

Another example of negative future prospects going hand in hand with deteriorated family connections is provided by the case of the 58-year-old woman, whom I have interviewed in 2010 as well. Shortly after the disaster, her relationship with her husband and three adult sons was still very good, she even lived with one of the children and his partner, even before the disaster. Their relationships deteriorated when his husband decided, independently from her, that they should move to another settlement. The interviewee experienced this as if being forced into a situation. She did not get sufficient emotional support from her immediate family, either, which also added to the isolation

she repeatedly mentioned in the interview in 2013. In her words:

“At home we cannot talk about it (The disaster and the difficulties of moving). Everyone tells me to get over it. My husband is very well, too. My son and daughter-in-law, absolutely. They have had a new baby since then. I should be happy, but I am not. (...) I was crying like mad, that I can't imagine that they pull down my house and I have to leave. I don't believe it. Then he said: But, mother, put up with it. – Then they treated me very harshly. Everybody.”

By moving to a new settlement, she has also been torn from her neighbourhood ties, she can meet her mother and brother less often, and the visits of her two other sons have also become rarer. So she has lost contact with those of her family who live separately from her but still meant her support, and the feeling of isolation has increased. Observing her future prospects, we can see that they are laden with explicitly hopeless, aimless, and negative emotions. She talks about the future repeatedly:

“I fear that nothing could get me out of this. (...) I fear that by the time it is all done... (referring to tidying the garden) (...) it is still not certain that it will be better for me. It will be better for them. I do know it will be better for everyone.”

“The problem is that I think I don't even have an image of the future. I am here today. And I will still be here tomorrow. About the day after, I don't know (...) I always think that perhaps that was taken from me, that is what I have lost.” (her future prospects) (2013. Woman, age 58, married, three adult sons, lives with husband and the family of a son, farmer).

From the examples, it is clear that when a man cannot experience supporting someone in the family, or a woman does not get the sufficient level of support, then the family cannot fulfil its role as a resource that could

help trauma procession. By this, in turn, the individuals' future prospects may be seriously harmed.

At the beginning of the analysis, we claimed that family as a community plays the most important role in the formation of personal happiness and harmony. The last section also supports this statement, as no other group was found so strongly to determine the individual's trauma procession and the formulation of future prospects as the family.

Summary

In the course of our analysis, we showed that in the life history narrations covering the years following the disaster, the individuals' family perception, on the one hand, showed strong gender based differences, and, on the other hand, split into two distinct categories: immediate and distant family were viewed separately. From the analysis conducted along three questions, it is clear that the individuals' social embeddedness is strongly influenced by the presence or absence of family ties, and their quality. We can conclude that in the cases where family members were present in a supporting way from the occurrence of the event itself until the time of the second set of interviews, the individuals had processed the trauma more successfully, and it was possible for relatively steady future prospects to form in three years.

To summarize the most important conclusions about the long-term processes, we can state the following:

Tight family ties help trauma procession. Directly after the disaster, the increased intensity of distant family contact made the affected experience their social embeddedness, through their aid and support. Changes in the immediate family – increasing amount of time spent together and frequent decision situations -at first led to conflicts and tension,

but we cannot see long-term, negative effects on family ties. The relationships that got too close – in the cases when parents moved in with adult children –, however, hindered trauma procession. In such cases, the interviewees were faced with several secondary traumas, because of their perceived failure in the parental role, and the elongated period of repeated movings. Observing the views of the affected about the development of family ties three years after the disaster, the most important phenomenon is that pre-disaster relationship structure was being re-established, in some cases, even more intensely as previously. This means that distant family relations returned to their pre-disaster, lower intensity level, while in the immediate family, relationships that, according to the interviewees, had been poor earlier, deteriorated a little, while former good relations grew stronger. So generally, no long-term changes could be observed as a consequence of the disaster.

The contact with distant relatives did not play a long-term role in trauma procession. We also found cases where immediate family ties deteriorated in the short run, even when they had been good before the disaster. In the background, we could distinguish single-person decisions, made by a single family member concerning important questions, or material reasons. The resulting, unfavourable state of the family hinders trauma procession. Some features of family life promote the procession of the events. The appearance of new, challenging tasks (such as a new job) divert the attention of the affected from all the damage of the disaster, and may also provide a sense of achievement, thus strengthening the individual's feeling of wellbeing, and also reinforcing their supportive role inside the family. There is a definite gender difference in the way individuals experience the supportive role of the family. For men, the possibility of supporting, of "leading" others offers improvement, while for women, receiving support from the family members (e.g. spiritual support,

physical help) – beside the several ways in which they also help and unite the family (e.g. help with the grandchildren, visiting children). We can see that classical gender roles are highly appreciated after the disaster. In summary, the presence of communication, emotional support (e.g. love, listening), practical help (e.g. household chores, administrative arrangements, decision making) and not being alone help the procession of the events for both genders. Contrarily, health problems, the death or loss of an immediate family member, the pressure of adaptation in the case of moving to adult children, and decreasing communication hinder it. It is an important finding of our examination that after such tragic events, the affected should be granted more opportunities to participate in caritative activities. Such tasks enhance the feeling of usefulness of the affected persons, and may also mitigate their sense of defencelessness. Besides this, these tasks also contribute to trauma procession by shifting the focus of the attention of the affected away from their own, hardly repairable damages, and provide purpose where the affected has a chance to be "successful".

The future prospects explored directly after the disaster were characterised by expressly negative elements and hopelessness. In the long run, we can see that after the re-establishment of daily order and settling into a new home, plans returned to their pre-disaster state, so they had not been substantially altered by the disaster. The future prospects after three years tended to be expressly negative, aimless, and "stranded" only in the cases where immediate family relationships had been good before the disaster, but, in its wake, have severely deteriorated. This also supports the statement we made at the beginning of our analyses, that, three years after the tragedy, the most important factors influencing the degree of recovery in the lives of the affected are not their roles in other communities, not even their homes or surroundings, or the re-establishment of daily order, but the state of their families.

Notes

¹ In December 2010 Devecser was sealed up by the authority, thus I was not able to make more interviews. My recorded interviews were enough to clearly understand the main tendencies.

² For the analysis, I could use a pool of 70 further interviews, which were recorded between 22 August and December 2013. For these, I owe special thanks to the students of the Sociology and Social Studies Department of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University. In this study, these interviews were only used as background material, detailed analysis was only performed on the 25

interviews recorded by myself. The tendencies which were outlined in the interviews recorded by myself were confirmed, after reviewing these additional interviews.

³ The term “indirectly affected” refers to all the inhabitants of Devecser, who had not suffered personal material or health damage. This terminology is also applied in other studies with similar topics (Bartal and Ferencz, 2015).

⁴ In the interview excerpts, personal data refer to the date of recording.

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