

Youth Perception on Marriage and Married Life: an Analysis from the Republic of Macedonia

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Abstract—Frequent public use of the thesis “marriage as family foundation is in crisis or possibly disappearing” comes as a product of statistical analysis about decreased number of marriages, increased divorces, decreased birthrate, large number of singles not entering marriage nor forming a family. Young people seem uninterested in marriage as a community; they enjoy freedom of living in non-marital cohabitation or simply under their parent’s roof.

The above-mentioned phenomena in cited our research interest mainly for two reasons: firstly, lifestyle changes influence society and the individuals as well; secondly, marriage as a community evolves and impacts family as a union and family’s future models.

The main purpose of this paper is representing youth’s opinion on marriage in the Republic of Macedonia. For this purpose we conducted a quantitative survey on 120 university students, determining their positions and opinions about marriage and married life. The answers from the survey are intended to help us understand the current trends and predict possible future developments of marriage and family in Macedonia.

Besides the quite alarming negative tendencies in current statistical data regarding birth rate, marriage and divorce, our results show that youth in Macedonia consider marriage a natural flow in their lives, a reflection of maturity, success and prosperity.

Keywords– marriage, marital community, image of marriage, youth, Republic of Macedonia

I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is one of the oldest institutions that passed different development stages, but always served for the regulation of sexual relations between husband and wife and procreation of offspring. In recent years there are rapid and radical changes in marital life globally. According to many authors, the most significant changes that lead to the remodeling marriage and intimate life is the emergence and widespread adoption of individualism and the primacy of the individuals and their desires, needs and interests. Unlike the past when marriage and family were of fundamental importance to social life, they are no longer a feature of modern society.

Changes are inevitable. Every social category, even marriage and marital relations are subject to change. Although research results depend from country to country, one research performed in the South African Republic showed that “...most

young people still think of themselves as being destined to marry. Their attitudes towards the happiness and success of their future marriages are positive”¹. The impacts also reflect on the beliefs about marriage and marital relationships. Global processes provide general and specific information on marriage, marital relations and communities in the world. This available information reflects upon the notions and understandings of marriage in local conditions. Young people from the Republic of Macedonia on the basis of open access to information, knowledge, and researches are informed about the conditions and developments of new models of marriage and the relations in them (this refers to the freedom of entering into marriage, the democratization of relations in marriage, conditional and real equality of spouses, then same-sex marriages and their (in)-ability to adopt children and other issues in the practice of modern marital living).

Marriage today represents a real challenge for researchers, but also for young people who in the future should form their own families. Modern married life does not include only the communities based on traditional grounds (marriage between a man and a woman), but also communities that are enabled with global and European trends and practices (many countries in their own legislation allow and arrange the conclusion of marriage, establishment of marital communities of same-sex PARTNERS and define their rights in the legal and social system, cohabitation, etc.).

The young population has a wide range of beliefs, desires and statements about the valuation of the institution of marriage, qualification of relationships in marriage and their position in a possible marriage (if a young person sees itself in a classic marriage it does not mean that there is animosity or negative positions on cohabitation communities, same-sex marriages, etc.). It is necessary to investigate what are these beliefs and standpoints in order to determine to what extent they differ from the current idea of marriage as a long-term practice, which in Macedonia is a union between a man and a woman and a necessary precondition for forming a family.

Initially we had a dilemma if the global trends are more influential to youth comparing the traditional values in Macedonia and we expected to find out more students being against marriage, especially when it comes to age of marriage

¹ T. du Toit, “Marriage in the 21st Century: Attitudes and Perceptions of University Students”. University of Cape Town. Cape Town.

(our predictions was mid-thirties) or extra-marital communities (we expected cohabitation to prevail marriage). Moreover, we assumed that the results will replicate the social environment whose dominant understanding is affirming traditional marriage and close-minded communities where there is a prevailing negative standpoint on the models and forms of marriage such as cohabitation, same-sex marriages, spouses with different places of residence, etc. However, the results did not confirm our initial expectations.

II. MARRIAGE

In the Republic of Macedonia, marriage is a legal and recognized union between a man and a woman. Marriage represents a specific form of social relations based on which a family is formed. Above all, it is a form of biological i.e. sexual relations between a husband and a wife, an institution that means socially approved relationship between different genders². In some societies marriage marks the relationship of partners of the same sex, known as homosexual marriages. Same-sex marriages are legal in many countries: the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Canada, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, Ireland, Croatia, Slovenia, Argentina, Denmark, France, Brazil, Uruguay, New Zealand, Great Britain and Luxembourg. Mexico and the United States allow same-sex marriages in certain regions or states. Many other countries offer some kind of protection for same-sex couples.

From a legal point and constitutional point of view, marriage transforms the status of husband and wife and specifies their sex lives, defines the standpoint towards children and establishes the right of mothers to children and relatives and, finally, determines the right of inheritance of property. Most anthropologists agree that a definition of marriage includes several elements that are inherent to all communities that can be called marital. "In cultural terms, marriage establishes the relations between a man and a woman from different families, which regulates sex life and offspring"³.

The reasons for concluding a marriage may differ: from emotional to social, economic, legal, financial and religious motives. The rights and obligations arising from marriage are: marital fidelity, love, compassion, confidence, patience, desire, sexual satisfaction-communication, bearing life discomfort, collaborative problem-solving, abiding by the general rules and regulations, mutual care of the partners, paying attention, sincerity, honesty, respect, compassion with partners, a common concern for children and the home, etc.

III. THE SITUATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

The Republic of Macedonia in its normative concept implies concluding a marriage solely between a man and a woman with socially prevalent standpoint that cohabitations should be protected and they enjoy the same benefits as basic marital community.

² T. Chokrevski, "Sociologijanapravoto," Skopje: Nip StudentskiZbor, p.276, 2001.

³ I. Acevski, "KulturnaAntropologija: BrakiSemejstvo," Skopje: FilozofskiFakultet Skopje, pp. 308-313, 2015.

Since 1991 marriage is legally defined in Macedonia in the Constitution in Article 40, paragraph 1 and 2 stipulating "Republic of Macedonia provides special care and protection of the family. Legal relations in marriage, the family and cohabitation are regulated by law". In addition, according to the Law on Family of 2014, Article 6, marriage represents "a legally regulated community of life of a man and a woman answering to the interests of spouses, family and society". Relations between spouses are based on the free decision of a man and a woman to enter into marriage, on their mutual equality, respect and assistance. Macedonian cohabitation communities enjoy the same rights of married couples as far as the right to mutual economic support and property rights are concerned, including legal protection against domestic violence. The Republic of Macedonia does not officially recognize any kind of same sex community, either marital or extra marital⁴.

Statistics for the Republic of Macedonia show us the following data: the number of divorces is increasing and the number of marriages is reducing. Namely, from 710 divorces that were concluded in 1995, the number rose to 2.045 divorces in 2013. The number of marriages in 2013 was 13.982, 15.490 in 2007, whilst in 1994 we had 15.736 marriages. Furthermore, the average age of marriage also increases, which indicates that couples marry later. Thus, today's average age of couples who marry is 25.8 for women and 28.6 for men. In comparison, in 2004 the average age was 24 for women and 27 for men and in 1994 it was 23 for women and 25 for men.⁵

The negative trends in respect to the parameter marriage also affect fertility and reproduction. The Republic of Macedonia since its independence has seen a continuous decline in birthrate. According to the State Statistical Office of Macedonia in 1995 were born 32.154 children, in 2005 were born 26.083, and in 2013 - 23.334 children. The birth rate ranged from 17% in early nineties to the current 11% (data under 15% is considered low birthrate). This would mean that in the last twenty years, i.e. since the beginning of the transition, were born 9.000 less children. The reduction of the birth rate has led to a reduction of the vital index, i.e. fewer live births compared with deaths, which in the period from 2007 to 2011 was 121 live births to 100 deaths and compared with the data from the past five decades has fallen by two thirds. The rate of natural increase (the difference between live births and deaths) from 8.1 in 1994 dropped to 1.9 in 2013. The rate of total fertility (cumulative fertility rate) has reached the limit of 1.46 children on average per woman in fertile period (15-49)⁶. The minimum for simple reproduction, not for population increase, is 2.1 children per woman, a rate characteristic of the total fertility rate in 1994.⁷

⁴ Family Law, revised text, General Provisions, retrieved from: http://www.mts.gov.mk/wbstorage/files/zakon_semejstvo_osnoven.pdf (13/11/2015)

⁵ Announcement on Marriages and Divorces by the State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, 11/06/2015, retrieved from: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSooptenie.aspx?rbtxt=11> (17/03/2016)

⁶ Announcements on Birth Rates (2010-2015) by the State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, retrieved from: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrethodniSooptenijaOblast.aspx?id=8&rbrObl=2> (17/03/2016).

The postponement of marriage also delays childbirth. Women give birth to their first child much older, and if the average age for the birth of the first child was 23 years in 1994, today the birth of the first child is postponed until the 28th year. Women more often decide to give birth to a child without entering into marriage. Almost 12% of births are in cohabitation. This parameter also registers growth by 4% compared to 1994 when it was 8%.

IV. CASE STUDY FROM MACEDONIA: YOUTH PERCEPTION OF MARRIAGE

In order to receive a wider image on how young people in Macedonia perceive marriage and married life, during February 2016, we conducted a quantitative research on a sample of 120 examinees. The sample was made of students in the first and second year of studies at the Faculty of Philosophy at The University SS. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje. Most of the examinees were at age between 18 and 22 (109), 7 were between 23 and 26 and only 4 were over the age of 26. The ratio between the genders was not proportional (due to the fact that examinees were selected arbitrarily and we could not affect this outcome) 98 were female whereas 22 were male. The majority of the examinees were originally from Skopje, 90 of them grew up in an urban environment. It is an important note, that the greatest part declared themselves to be heterosexuals (114), and almost half of them are in a relationship (54).

The questionnaire is composed of 52 questions, divided into five parts. Beside general questions for the examinees and their families, the questionnaire also contains specific questions and standpoints on marriage, married life, offspring, divorce, cohabitation and same-sex communities. As this research was the first of its kind for the students in their first and second year of studies, the formulation of the questions and the proposed answers were simple and understandable. The students mostly answered by: I agree/I disagree and Yes/No multiple choice answers.

Considering the size of the questionnaire, this paper is an analysis of the questions that most directly reflect the perception of young people regarding marriage.

First of all, we wanted to evaluate the effect of the surroundings, i.e. the community where the examinees live. The questions referred to the type of family, marital status of parents, proximity and influence. The results we got provided us with the following image: our examinees mostly (101) live in a traditional family type, 74 of which in a nuclear family (parents and children) and 28 in extended families (multiple generations). Only few of them live in so called 'modern' families. 17 examinees live in a single parent family and one examinee in a reconstructed family (with a step father or step mother). See figure 1 (Family type).

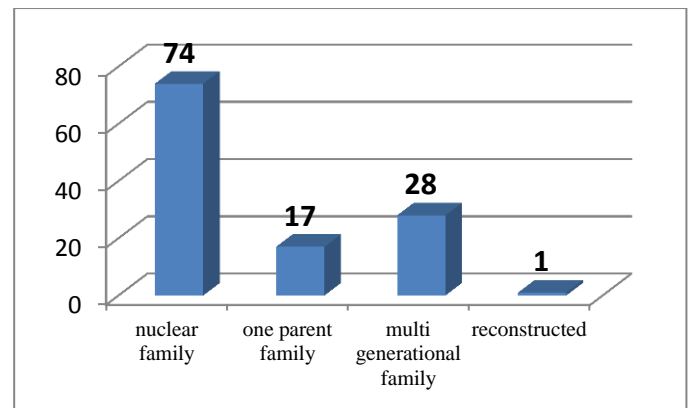


Figure 1. Family type

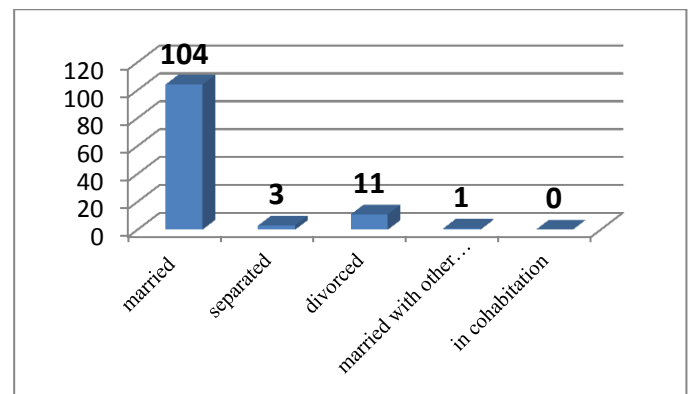


Figure 2. Marital status of your parents

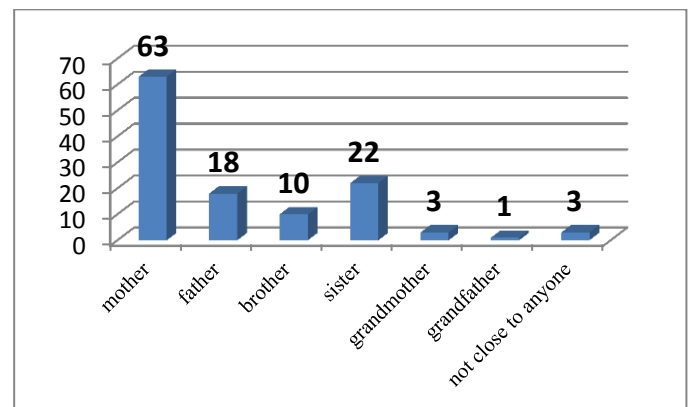


Figure 3. Closest member of your family

Our results show that the nuclear family model is the most common type of family in the Republic of Macedonia, as defined by the Constitution of Macedonia (i.e. marital community between a man and a woman and their children). It is surprising that in our contemporary society the extended family model i.e. "zadruga"⁷ is still present. We assume that

⁷The multigenerational type of family commonly known in the region by the term "zadruga" was characteristic for the Balkans until the late 19th and the early 20th century. Besides having more than two generations residing in the

mostly bad economic situation forces married couples to live with their parents.⁸

In support of the traditional image on marriage in the Republic of Macedonia, the marital status of the examinees' parents is added. Namely, the greatest part of them is married (105). The European tendencies of families where parents live apart, divorces, remarrying and in wed locks are almost not present in the Republic of Macedonia. 11 examinees have parents who are divorced, 3 who are separated, 1 parent who is married to another partner and none of the examinees has parents who live in an extra-marital community. See figure 2 (Marital status of your parents).

The closest family member of the examinees is the mother (63), the rest of the examinees(54)are closer to their father (18), brother (10), sister (22), grandmother (3), grandfather (1), and three examinees are not close to anyone; see figure 3 (Who is the closest member of your family?). This result also supports the conclusion that in the Republic of Macedonia the traditional model of families where the mother is in charge of the care and education of children and spends most of the time with them is quite present.

In general, our interviewees have a positive perception of their families. 113 are pleased with their family and mark it as harmonic (64) or a family that functions well (49). See figure 4 (How would you describe your family?).

Furthermore, we wanted to verify what young people think of the reasons of marriage, the ideal age for marriage and children. According to the students (113) oveis the most important reason for concluding a marriage, which is at the same time estimated as the most important precondition for a happy marriage (63). Economic stability (3), reproduction (1), fear of loneliness (3) or pressure from the environment (0) is almost no motivation for entering into matrimony.

Besides the fact that the instinct for reproduction is one of the main reasons for matrimony, the students have a different opinion. This may be the result of their age and the romantic ideals characteristic for young people.

same household, it was generally a patriarchal type of family i.e. once a woman got married she used to go to live with her husband's parents, where his unmarried sisters and married brothers lived as well.

⁸The process of transition and the new economic situation in the country has significantly aggravated the providing of material existence of the average Macedonian family. On the one hand, the privatization, the fall of many factories and measures for over-employment left many people jobless. In 1994, the unemployment rate in Republic of Macedonia escalated to 30% and has not dropped since.

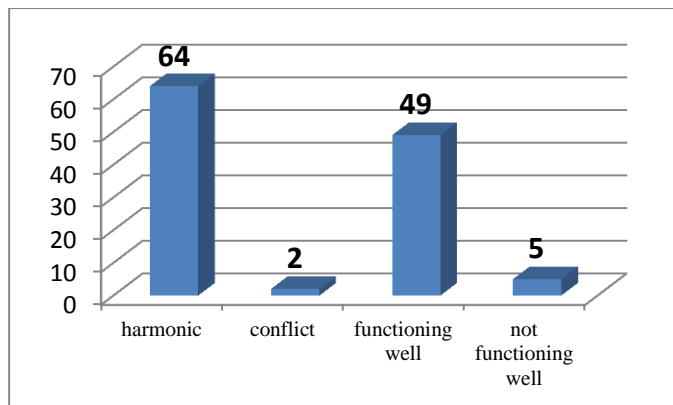


Figure 4. Describe your family

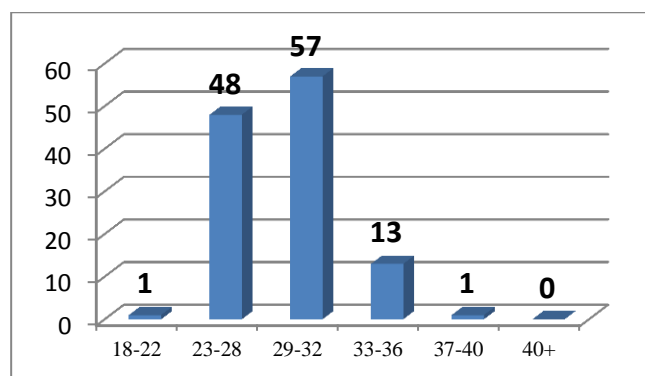


Figure 5. Ideal age to have children

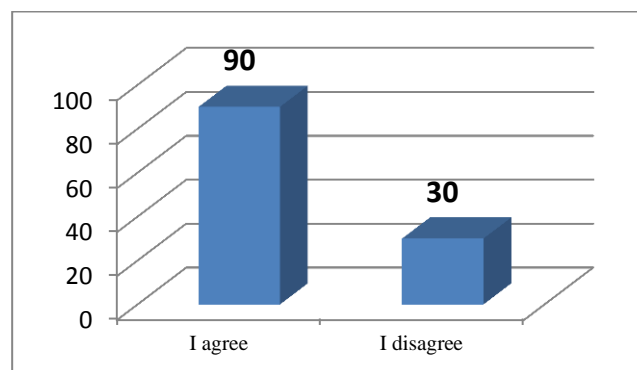


Figure 6. Marriage helps people become mature

The examinees believe that they should be married by reaching the age of 30. As a matter of fact, the ideal age for most of them is the age between 23 and 28 (79), 29-32 (30), 33-36 (7), 37-40 (3). Also, they generally believe that they should become parents by the age of 30 (105), 23-28 (48), 29-32 (57). None of the examinees believes that 40+ is the ideal age for entering into marriage or having children. See figure 5(What is the ideal age to have children?). These results confirm the above-mentioned data in the Republic of Macedonia.

The perception of marriage in general can be graded as positive. The majority of youth believe that marriage is a benefit for the individual and a ticket to a happier life. 70 examinees believe that married people are happier than single people, 88 think that marriage creates certain advantages, as many as 90 of them think that marriage helps individuals become more mature (see figure 6) and according to 83 examinees, a successful marriage is more important than a successful career. If we add the 87 examinees that had imagined their own wedding, we can draw a conclusion that marriage in the form we are familiar with is respected, expected and a desired way of forming a family.

Minor deviations in the answers can be seen in the statement “Marriage is forever” where a little over half of the examinees answered negatively (66) (see figure 7) and the statement “Most marriages end unhappily or in divorce” where opinions are divided in half (60 agree and 60 disagree, see figure 8). This shows that divorce is not perceived as a tragedy but as something expected from marriage. Also, the larger part, 62, would not sacrifice their own career for marriage and 107 would not forgive infidelity in marriage, which shows that marriage is not accepted by “all means” and that young people would not remain in a bad marriage.

In regards to cohabitation, it may be noted that young people are pretty familiar with this community, partly approve and accept it but mostly look at it as a step before entering into matrimony. The biggest part of the examinees would live in a community outside marriage (86) only if it leads towards a formal matrimony. Thus, 48 examinees accept it as a form of engagement and 38 as a form of a “rehearsal marriage”.

More progressive opinions can be noted in the statements that “It is acceptable that a woman gives birth to a child outside a partnership community” where less than a half of the examinees agree (55) and in the question “Do you approve same sex communities”?, where 50 examinees answered positively. It can be concluded that young people slowly accept the changes brought by global trends.

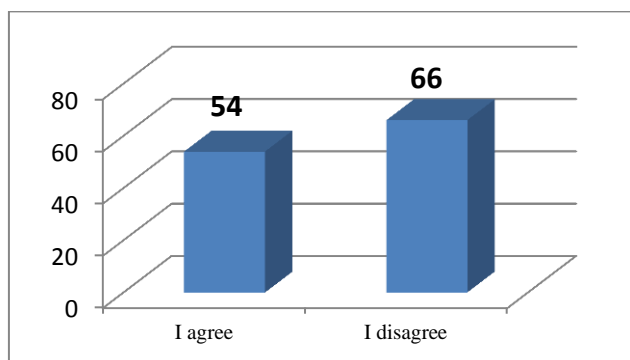


Figure 7. Marriage is forever

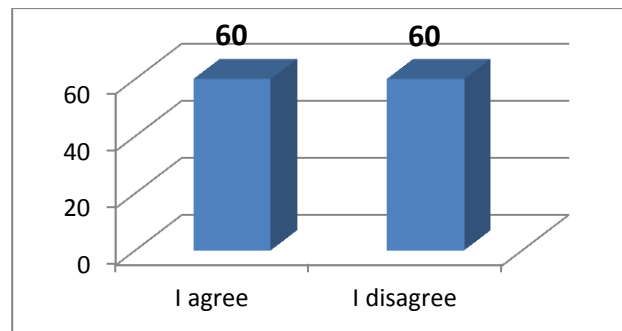


Figure 8. Most marriages end unhappy or in divorce

V. CONCLUSION

A general conclusion that marriage in newer times is not a lot different than marriage we know may be adopted. Or, to be more precise, young peoples’ idea of marriage does not deviate from the classic and well know idea of marriage. Young people consider marriage as a natural flow in their lives. They see it as a reflection of maturity, success and prosperity. Their perceptions of marriage are generally positive which makes them desire it and imagine it as a sort of ideal. Our assumption is that this is the case as most of the examinees come from nuclear and harmonic families and have parents who are married so it is logical they desire the same for themselves.

The influence of the current situations and changes in the view of marriage and married life that are taking place in developed Europe are still minor in comparison to the conservative leant standpoints for marriage and family in Macedonia. The processes of urbanization and globalization are key factors influencing changes in the family model. However, these phenomena in Macedonia were noted later than other European countries, thus the belated transformation of family in our society.

As explained in Part III, the negative trends in the current statistical data in the birth rate, marriage, divorce etc. are sufficiently motivating for research and action, especially the decrease of the birthrate might be considered alarming. Although, in Macedonia, there are mainly conservative standpoints in terms of changes in marital and family relations, still the numbers are showing that changes take place here as well and the reasons for those changes represent a potential for additional research.

The new era brings serious changes in the family structure which is an additional impetus for research and analysis for the science of families. Under the pressure of modern social tendencies, marriage is becoming more vulnerable as a consequence of external social influences and more complex as a subject of analysis. This research has incited us to continue with an additional qualitative analysis aiming to provide additional explanation of our results. Finally we would like to reexamine the same examinees in their final year of studies, in order to compare their points of view.

In conclusion, marriage remains an institution of great significance in reaching personal happiness and wellbeing of the individual. People argue for marriage every day, cry over it and celebrate it. Marriage is important on many intermingled

levels: emotionally, logistically, socially and financially. The maxima that marriage is the last resort where the human being can find shelter and peace from all other storms in a society and that marriage is the basis of the family has still shown to be true.

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