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CONTEMPORARY FAMILIES IN NORTH MACEDONIA: TRANSFORMATIONS AND NEW REALITIES

In the last few decades, families have changed as a result of technological development, globalization and the modern way of living. Families have changed in their structure, development and every day dynamics. The common believe that family is an essential community for the development of each individual and society has changed as well. On the one hand, we can talk about the changing role of women and their increasing representation in the labor market. Moreover, the desire for individualization among youth has irreversibly changed the concept of marriage. On the other hand, the complex and unfavorable trends in society, the decline of moral values, vices, domestic violence, unemployment and general poverty, burden the family functioning.

Globally and locally, the most important institution in society faces many challenges. It is inevitable to ask ourselves whether the "family" is in crisis.

This paper aims to address family-related issues in the Republic of North Macedonia. That is, by analyzing the existing indicators of marriage, divorce, fertility and birthrate to determine the current situation in the country. This paper will also present a research which will provide insights into how the family is perceived. It will seek answers to questions such as what are the strengths and weaknesses of the contemporary families. Which family functions are considered important? And what are the biggest changes for Macedonian families?

Key words: family, marriage, family functions, family changes

Introductory remarks

Due to its dynamic nature as one of the dominant characteristics, family could never be studied as a static social category. The numerous transformations and changes in our social life seen through the dynamic way of life, have a huge impact on the family and family relationships. For this reason, in certain periods of time, family has changed completely, or certain phenomena related to it have changed. Primarily, the ideas about love have been changed. In the twentieth and twenty-first century the experience was quite different from the one in the nineteenth century (P. George, Bethke Elshtain, 2013). Namely, while in the traditional society the physiognomy of the family consisted of many people from different generations, in the modern society it is mostly content by parents and children, i.e. the family gets its new structure, the nuclear

family. Changes in the structure and function of the family are recognizable in other areas, such as: separation of sexuality from reproduction, change in the concept and practice of parenting, change in the basic functions of the family. More specifically, replacement of production with consumption function, where the Consumer lifestyle becomes the dominant pattern of life for all families. Also, family roles are changing, domestic responsibilities, equal distribution of power etc., (Acevski, 2013). As a result of the changes over the years, the family no longer enjoys a monopoly, but more models of modern families are present, such as extramarital families, single-parent families, reconstructed, same-sex families, etc.

Those changes have been present in Europe for a long time but nowadays are more and more noticeable in our society. The effects of globalization, as well as the long period of transition, affects a number of changes in the Macedonian family: redefining the roles of family members as well as the family model itself, changing functions and lifestyle in general. From large families living in communities where the man is the head of the family, the families are getting narrower, the woman becomes a respected and affirmed figure, not only in the family, but also in the labor market and in society. New family models, such as single-parent families, reconstructed families, and single-sex families, are now more common in the Republic of North Macedonia. In the past, the family was a pillar from which it originated and in which the process of socialization took place. Families were functioning as a community. Education, socializing, and having fun, were within or between families. Today, the individual is the center of the universe and one computer or mobile phone is enough to socialize. Individuality is new dominant characteristic of new generations. Individualism has tendency to replace the altruism of the past. If big family and many children was representing happiness and wealth, today it has been replaced by individualism which implies greater comfort for men and women, independence, a successful career and so on. That gets the impression that the socializing, as well as the other functions of the family are no longer important, but the individual needs.

The changes are visible in terms of the perceptions about marriage, i.e. the development of the idea of romantic love, which idealizes love and puts it in the first place, primarily as a reason for marriage, as something that is considered to fulfill all desires and expectations. Romantic love is based on the idea of strong attraction of people, and marriage is the community that can best emphasize this condition (Acevski, 2013). Having children and economic

security as reasons for getting married and starting a family are increasingly losing their significance. Young people want to get satisfaction and fulfillment from married life and are not ready to make concessions at the expense of personal happiness (Radulovic and Avirovic, 2014).

The direct effects of industrialization on the family and marriage, as the oldest institutions, are seen in the applied living and working conditions of women and children followed by changes in regulations and social norms, education, status of women, equality, improved living standards of the population, voluntary limitation of childhood in the family, i.e. conscious family planning (Sheran, 1993). If we analyze the data from the independence of the Republic of North Macedonia until today, we will notice that for this period in our country every year 2000 fewer marriages are concluded, we have 1500 more divorces per year, over 10,000 fewer children were born per year, and the age of entering marriage increases and having a first child as well. Also, the number of illegitimate children rose above 13% of the total number of children born, and the fertility rate reached the "black" European average of 1.42 children per woman.

The changes of family values that are considered important are significant to mention. Attitudes toward the family model, marriage, partnerships, having and raising children are largely determined by our value system, which is not exported today when modern times face a moral vacuum. Family values, which were characteristic at the time of the so-called "Socialist morality" (such as respect, mutual understanding and tolerance, love and support, respect and sacrifice for other family members, mutual help and services, hard work for the benefit of the family), stand against possible negative perceptions and practices (materialism, intolerance, rudeness, sharpness and anger, exclusivity, competition between family members, lack of constant communication or intergenerational communication).

In such conditions, the family loses its identity more and more, it becomes unclear what is the role of the family. The Macedonian family today is faced with the challenge of dealing with the effects of change on the one hand, and yet retaining the elements of the traditional Macedonian family, on the other.

Statistical data

If we analyze the data through years, we can conclude that number of marriages is decreasing, whilst the number of divorces increased compared to the previous years.

The contrast in numbers is significant when compared to data from the first census of 1994 with more recent data. In the last decades, the number of marriages has decreased from 15,736 in 1994 to 13,814 in 2019, whilst the number of divorces has augmented from 710 in 1995 to 1,990 in 2019 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia). Some of the factors for such trends are alterations of ethical and moral standards, a general predominance of individualism, the emancipation of women, and reduced influence of religion. Furthermore, the increased average age at first marriage, extended studies, postponed employment (due to studies or unemployment), and unresolved housing.

In the period from 1995 to 2019 the number of divorces has increased by 3 times, i.e. in 1995 there were 710 divorces, while according to the data of the State Statistical Office in 2019 there were 1,990 divorces. The analysis of the data shows that the trend of increasing the number of divorces starts in 1997 and is constantly on the rise, except in 2008 and 2009 when a decrease in the number of divorces was registered compared to previous years. But already in 2010 it continues to increase again. In the same period of time, when divorces have been analyzed, the data shows that the number of marriages is decreasing, but with less intensity. That is, in 19 years in Macedonia the number of marriages has decreased by 12% or in 1995 there were 15,823 marriages and in 2019 13,814 couples got married.

According to the data of the State Statistical Office, of 93.1% people that getting married are women and 91.4% men. 7.9% of marriages are second marriages for one partner, and 0.7% are third (Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, 2018).

The negative tendencies in the marriage parameter also affect the birth rate and reproduction. Since its independence, the Republic of North Macedonia had a continuous decline in the birth rate. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, in 1995 32,154 children were born, in 2005 26,083 were born, in 2013 23,334 children, and in 2019 19,845. This would mean that in the last twenty years, i.e. since the beginning of the transition, 12,309 fewer children were born per year. The decrease in the birth rate has led to a decrease in the vital index, i.e. a decrease in the number of live births compared to deaths. In 2019, a negative natural increase is observed for the first time.

The total fertility rate during the last decade is slowly decreasing. This number indicates a Macedonian position in the group of countries where

fertility is below the level of replacement. The reasons for such a situation are complex - cultural, demographic, economic, and health-related factors.

The total fertility rate for 2019 (cumulative fertility rate) reached the limit of 1.42 children on average per woman in the fertile period (15-49 years). The minimum for simple reproduction, not population growth, is 2.1 children per woman, a percentage characteristic of the 1994 total fertility rate.

Postponement of marriage also postpones birth. Women later in life have their first child, so if the average age for giving birth to the first child was 23 in 1994, today the birth of the first child is delayed until the age of 30. Women are increasingly deciding to have a child without getting married. In 2019, 13.4% of the total number of children born are from an extramarital union. This parameter also increased by 5 percent compared to 1994 when it was 8%.

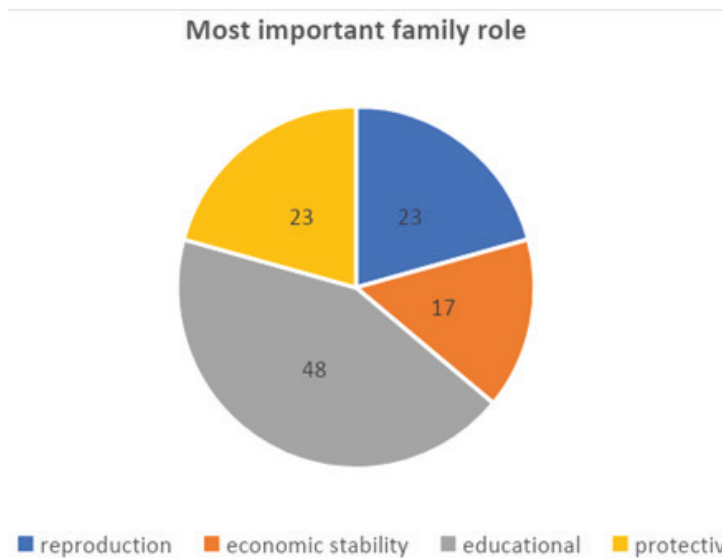
There is still no single legal definition of this term in our legislation lone families. The percentage of mothers with children in the Republic of North Macedonia is 7% while fathers with children is 2%. The total percentage of these types of families (which do not bear a special name, e.g. single families / single-family families), according to the Statistical Office is 9%.

Conducted Research

For the needs of this paper, a research was conducted on the topic "Changes of the Macedonian family". The purpose of this research was to get more clear picture of what Macedonian families are like; which family models they belong to; what are their strengths and what are their weaknesses; Which functions are considered important and most importantly to what extent families have changed. This research was conducted through the GOOGLE FORM platform, on a random sample of 111 respondents who voluntarily and anonymously answered 13 questions. 93 of the respondents are female and 18 are male. 38 respondents are aged 18-35 years, 63 are aged 35-50 and 10 are aged 50-65 years. 87 respondents are married and 24 are not married. 6 respondents belong to a family consisting of spouses, 79 respondents to a family with spouses and their children, 17 respondents to a family that includes spouses, their children and parents of spouses, 7 respondents are single parents living with their children and 2 respondents live in cohabitation without children.

First, respondents were asked "what is the most important role of the family".

Figure 1.

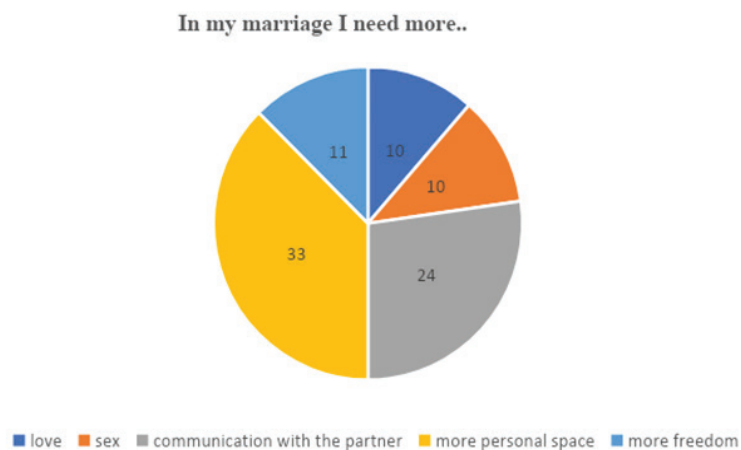


Most of the respondents think that the educational role of the family is the most important (Fig.1).

When asked “what are the biggest problems in your family”, most respondents point to finances (42) and even lack of communication (36). 15 of the members think that the biggest problem of their families is disrespect among the members. Only three of them cite domestic violence as a problem.

Almost all respondents who are married, said that they got married out of love, i.e. 76 respondents, and they also believe that they are happy in marriage. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents stated that they were missing something in their marriage.

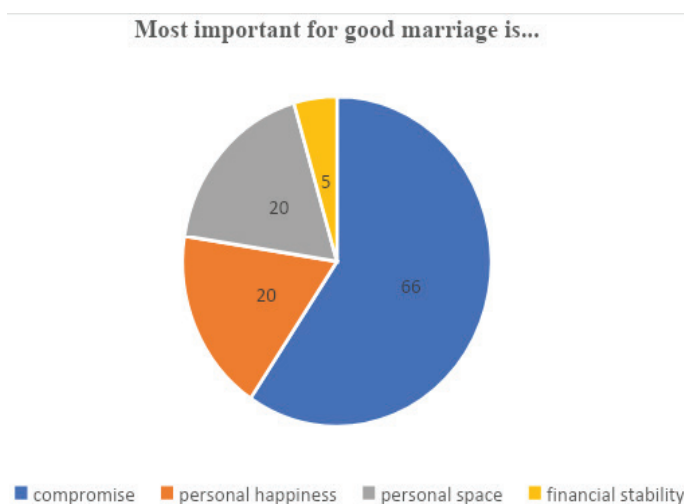
Figure 2



From the graph(Fig.2) we can see that most of the respondents who are married lack more personal space (33) and communication with their partner (24).

On the next question that is, “most important for a good marriage”, most respondents believe that compromise is a recipe for a good marriage, others cite personal happiness and space for personal development, and a small portion of finances (Fig 3).

Figure 3.



Further, the questionnaire contained several closed questions with offered answers *I agree / I don't agree*.

A major part of the respondents agrees with the claim: *Marriage without children is incomplete* (70%).

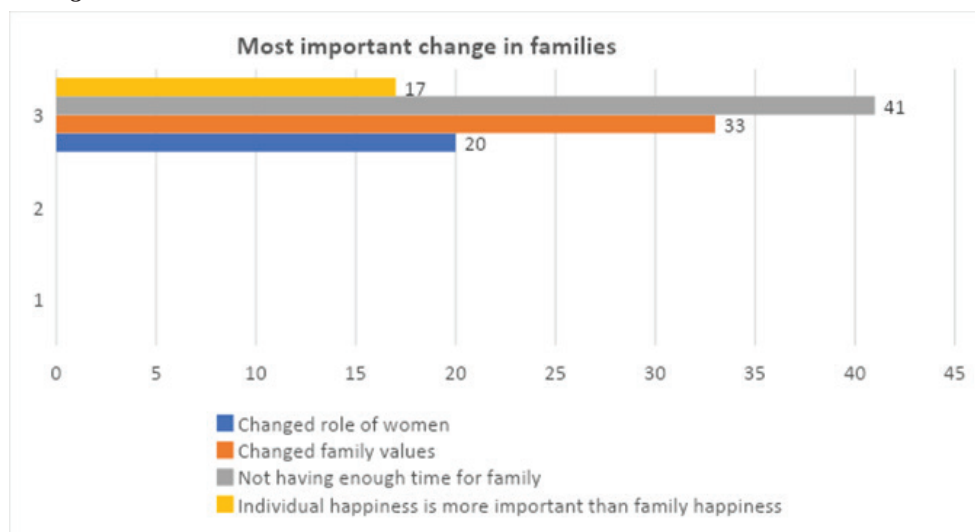
Opinions are divided in relation to the claim the marriage is same as cohabitation. 45% of the respondents agree, as opposed to 55% of the respondents who do not agree.

Largest part, do not agree with the claim: *The roles in your home are strictly divided into men and women* (80%). Others believe that there is a strict division of men and women roles in their home.

The next asked question was *What is the ideal number of children in the family?* 62 considered two children, 38, three children, and the other 11 prefer one child. However, the number of respondents who want multiple families dominates.

At the end of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked, *according to them, which family change is most important?*

Figure 4.



Most of them have chosen change that replace to not having enough time for family (41), 33 changed of family values. Others had point to the changed role of woman (20) and Individual happiness is more important than family happiness (17).

Conclusion

From the analysis of the existing statistical indicators, it can be noticed that in the last few decades the families in the Republic of North Macedonia have changed. Demographic trends related to families show negative tendencies. Analyzes from the early 1990s to the present, point to significant reductions in the number of marriages, the number of born children, and general fertility. On the other hand, the number of divorces is growing, as well as the number of years of couples getting married and having children. The conducted research shows changes in the structure of families. Most of the respondents belong to nuclear families, i.e. spouses and their children. The number of extended families that were characteristic of the Macedonian society before independence is decreasing. The functions of families also changed the reproductive function is no longer primary for marriage and family formation. Almost all respondents stated that they got married for love, and as the most important role of the family they cite the educational, i.e. the upbringing of future generations. The modern way of life and the pressure of everyday life on family and married life can be seen in some of

the answers of the respondents. Many of them consider the lack of communication as the main problem in their family, and the lack of enough time for the family as the most significant change of families today. The striving for individualization and personal fulfillment and happiness can be seen in the answers of the respondents where personal fulfillment, happiness and space for personal development are considered important preconditions for a good marriage, and lack of freedom and healing space for development are stated as something that respondents lack in marriage.

However, in some of the respondents' answers, traditional views regarding family life can be noticed. Most of the respondents are married, only a few are in an extramarital union or single parents. As many as half do not believe that marriage and extramarital affairs are equal, and most think that childless marriage is incomplete. There is still a positive perception of large families, the aspirations for fertility of the respondents are high, they believe that the ideal number of children in the family is two or three.

It can be concluded that the Macedonian family has transformed and is facing the challenges of the new realities. However, in many respects it remains traditional.

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