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CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE MACEDONIAN FAMILY (RESEARCH ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR FAMILY OF ORIGIN)

Abstract: Although the family as a community in which people are grouped for joint life has existed for a long time, in the last few decades it has undergone numerous changes regarding the structure. Globally, changes have been felt for a long time because of industrialization, urbanization, and increased participation of women in the labor market. Families tend to modernize, reorganize, and shrink. After the independence of the Republic of North Macedonia (1991), such changes have become more expressly recorded in the Macedonian society as well. Macedonian families increasingly migrate from villages to cities, fewer children are born, and women are educated and employed. Hence, slowly but surely, the dominant model of extended traditional families is being abandoned in favor of egalitarian nuclear families. The family tends to shrink and become estranged.

This paper aims to confirm this claim, thereby taking into consideration young people's perceptions of their family of origin. To that end, the data of two research studies from 2014 and 2022 were compared, in which young people aged 18-22 answer identical questions about the family they come from. In addition, this paper takes into consideration the available statistical indicators of the number and size of households, as well as other research on similar topics.

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Keywords: family, family of origin, young people, household, changes of the family

Introduction

The family as a community is the basic cell of an organism called society. It existed as early as in primary societies as large groups of people or communities. The concept of family is subject to social changes that occur throughout history. With the first social revolutions, the family acquires a different dimension of functioning, visibly modified by the primary communities. A large segment of the history of family functioning has been dominated by the traditional family model that was initially associated with existence in rural environments and is characterized by a high degree of authoritarianism, predictability, repeatability, and solidarity. However, with the processes of industrialization and urbanization, the family is faced with new challenges and problems. Following such social changes, the need for a functional reorganization of the family is inevitable. A model of a modern nuclear family is being created, characterized by prosperity in an urban environment, egalitarianism, dynamism, and isolation. Globalization processes clearly affect the changes of the primary group, that is, its functions at the global level.

At the beginning of the 18th century, the world population was estimated at 750 million. With the increasing urbanization and industrialization, the population exponentially increased, reaching one billion in 1830, two billion in 1930, three billion in 1960, five billion by 1990, and six billion in 2000. The growth is mostly due to the increased standard of living, i.e., life expectancy of people, improved sanitary conditions and control of infectious diseases, etc. However, directly proportionally to the increase in the standard of living in the countries of Western Europe, the United States and other countries, the fertility rate by 1990 had already started to decline and from 2020 a slow decline in the population is expected. (Ponzetti, 2003, Vol. 2, pp. 612-615).

The demographic and social changes of the 20th century in industrialized societies have mostly changed the dynamics of families, as well as the gender relations and roles of its members. Within these changes, we would single out the extended lifespan of people, the reduced birth rate and fertility, which resulted in a kind of verticalization of families in which the number of generations in one family increased, however the number of members within one generation decreased (Ponzetti, 2003, Vol. 1, p. 40). The

reduced number of family members is due to the reduced birth rate and the generally lower fertility of the parents.

In Canada, the average family size has been declining since the 1970s. In 1971, families had an average of 3.7 members; since 1986, the average has dropped to 3.1 persons. The situation is similar in the USA where an average American family in the 2000 had 3.2 members (Ponzetti, 2003, Vol. 1, p. 187). One of the countries with the lowest birth rate in Europe is Austria, where a continuous decrease in the birth rate has been observed since 1963. In 1999, the birth rate reached its lowest level of 1.31 children per woman, and similar data are observed in Spain, Italy, Greece, and the Czech Republic. In fact, in Austria families with four or more children almost completely disappeared after 1940 (Ponzetti, 2003, Vol. 1, p. 134). Childless families, on the other hand, are most represented in the USA, England, Australia, Denmark, Sweden, France, and Italy. These societies also have the lowest birth rates, a shrinking and aging population, and an insufficient labor force (Ponzetti, 2003, Vol. 1, pp. 275-278).

In 2021, there were 197 million households in the European Union with an average of 2.2 members. 49% of the households are parents with one child, 39% are parents with two children, 12% are parents with three children, and 13% are a single parent with a child. The number of households with one member, without children increased by 28.5% only in the period from 2009 to 2021 (Eurostat, 2021).

Conditions in the Republic of North Macedonia

The reduced birth rate in North Macedonia is not a new phenomenon at all, on the contrary, the statistical indicators show changes in the reproductive behavior of the population ever since the post-war period. For example, of 40.7 live births per 1000 inhabitants in 1948, that number gradually decreased, so in 1961 it was 29.9 and in 1981 it was 20.6. This number has continued to decrease over the past decades and today we are faced with a birth rate that is not sufficient to renew the generations. The size of a family and the decision on the number of children in the family certainly depend on several factors, including the level of development of the society in which they live, the economic well-being and social status of the family, the level of education of the family members, etc. According to the social status, i.e., the profession of the women, it is considered that the higher social status implies lower number of children she will give birth to. Thus, according to research from the 1980s on the reproduction of women in Macedonia, housewives gave birth to a higher number of children, and employed women gave birth to fewer children (Petroska, 1987, p. 233-240). Today, the birth rate

in North Macedonia continues to decline from one year to another, however not with a galloping intensity as in the above-mentioned European countries. However, the Republic of North Macedonia, since its independence, has recorded a continuous decline in the birth rate. According to the State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, the birth rate (live births per 1.000 inhabitants) ranged from 17 at the beginning of the nineties to 9.2 percent today. In addition, the current fertility rate in 2020 reached the lowest level of 1.31. The factors that mostly affect the low fertility in our country include the following: high and continuous unemployment, especially unemployment among the young population, low economic activity among women, as well as the continuous increase in the average age of the mother at the first birth (Demographic Policies and Gender Equality in the Republic of Macedonia: Measures to Promote Equality between Women and Men as Measures to Increase the Birth Rate, 2012).

The latest data from the population census conducted in 2021 show that the number of members living in the same household is also decreasing, although the total number of households is increasing. The number of households in 2021 was 598.632, and the average number of household members was 3.06 (State Statistical Office, 2021). In 1991, there were 505.852 households with 4.02 members (<https://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/PDFGodisnik2013/03-Naselenie-Population.pdf>, Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Macedonia, 2013). Of the processed data from the latest census, it can be seen that there are a total of 538.348 families in the country, of which 62 percent live in urban areas, and 38 percent live in rural areas. According to the family composition, most of them - 43 percent are married couples with at least one child under 25 years of age who lives with them, and 31 percent are married couples without children.

More than 26 thousand families or 4.9 percent of the families include a single mother with at least one child under 25 years of age, and more than nine thousand families or 1.7 percent are families of a single father with at least one child under 25 years of age. More than ten percent or approximately 58 thousand families are married couples where the youngest child who lives with them is 25 years old or older.

The 2021 population census shows that most families in the Republic of North Macedonia live in urban areas and those families have fewer members, which indicates that the nuclear family form dominates in these areas. A survey on the characteristics of families in urban and rural areas shows that the majority of families in rural areas live in an extended family. Their place of residence is patrifocal and they are usually engaged in all types of activities such as primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary. In rural areas,

families maintain significantly more contacts with the extended family and the neighbors. On the other hand, families in urban areas indicate that most of the families are nuclear with non-local residence. They usually perform the economic function through secondary, tertiary, and quarterly activities. The contacts with the extended family are generally reduced (Radulovikj and Mishevska, 2020).

Research on young people's perceptions of their family of origin

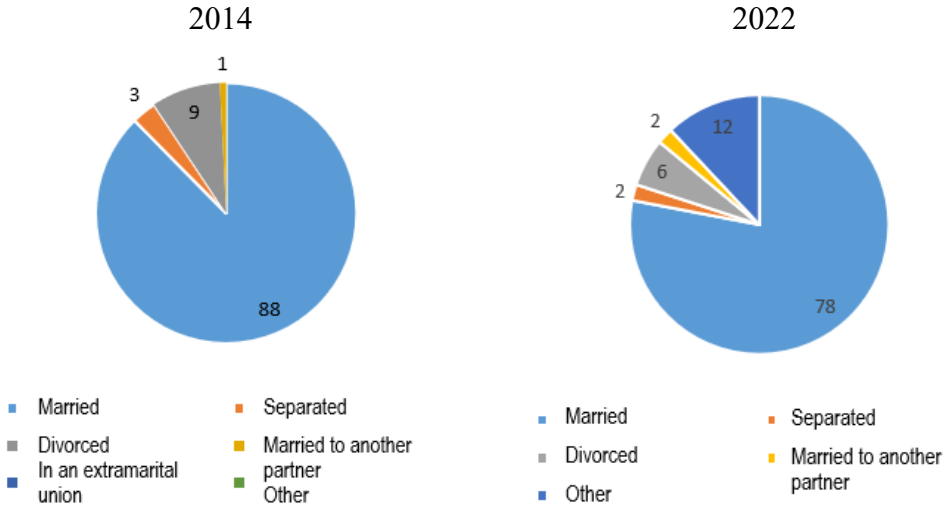
This research represents a small part of a wider quantitative analysis of young people's perceptions of family and marriage, where the subject of research is young people's perceptions of family, marriage, divorce and parenthood. Apart from the survey of the current perceptions and attitudes, the research is also a comparative study that examines the changes in the perceptions of young people over a period of 7 years. The comparative analysis, which is made by comparison with the same research conducted in 2014 (with an identical questionnaire and on the same quantum of sample), examines the dynamics regarding the understanding of marriage, extra/marital union, divorce, and parental role. Considering that it is a comparative study, the research was carried out on two samples. One sample refers to the survey conducted in 2014, and the other sample refers to the survey conducted in 2022. In both cases, it is a matter of a convenient sample, obtained through the snowball method. The difference between the two samples is in the method of data collection. The research in 2014 was carried out through the distribution of questionnaires, while in 2022 the research was carried out online through Google Forms. In both samples, due to the easy availability, the target group were students, mostly from the Faculty of Philosophy - Skopje. The sample in 2014 included 120 respondents ($N_{2014}=120$), while in 2022 it included 121 respondents ($N_{2022}=120$).

This paper covers the analysis of one of the research questions asked, that is:

- To examine the perceptions of young people in relation to their own family, that is, the family of origin.

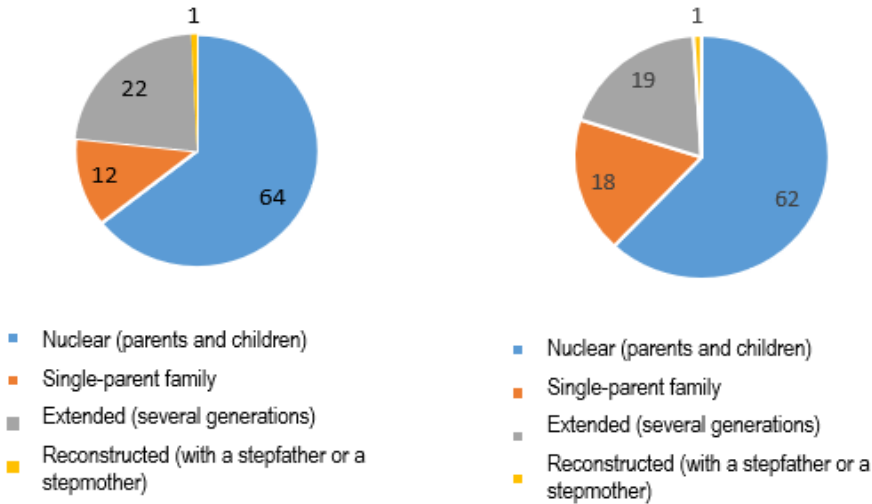
Most young people have parents who are married, 88% in 2014 and 78% in 2022. The percentage of parents who are separated or divorced is similar. In 2022, 12% selected the option 'Other', which mostly includes parents with a deceased partner.

Graph 1: Representation of the marital status of the respondents' parents: the values are in %



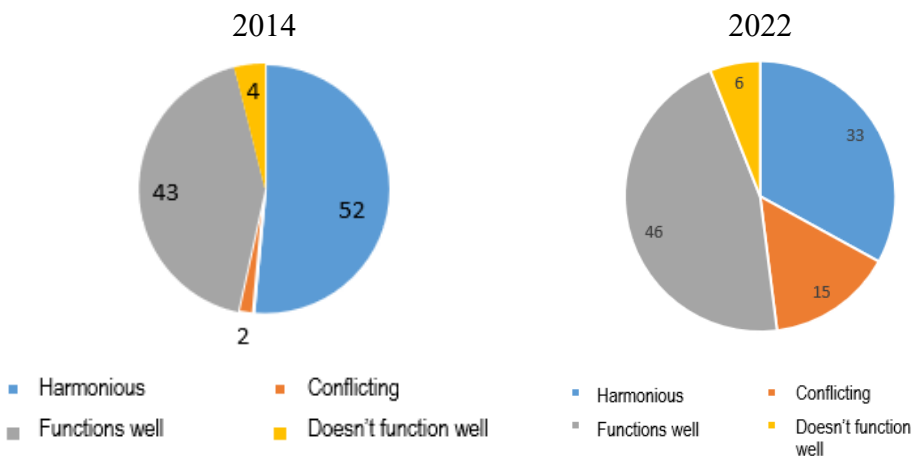
Same as in 2014, in 2022, the majority of young people live in a nuclear family, 64% in 2014 compared to 62% in 2022. Throughout these years, according to the results of our sample, the percentage of young people who live with one parent increased, from 12% in 2014 to 18% in 2022, and the number of young people who live in an extended family decreased, from 22% in 2014 to 19% in 2022. Graph 2 provides a visual representation of these tendencies.

Graph 2: What kind of family do young people live in the values are in %



Regarding the young people’s own perception of the functionality of their families, we would say that the percentage analysis records a deterioration of family relations compared to the research conducted in 2014. In 2022, the percentage of harmonious families decreased from 52% in 2014 to 33% in 2022. On account of that, the percentage of families that do not function well increased from 4% in 2014 to 6% in 2022, however the increased percentage of conflicting families from 2% in 2014 to 15% in 2022 is particularly striking.

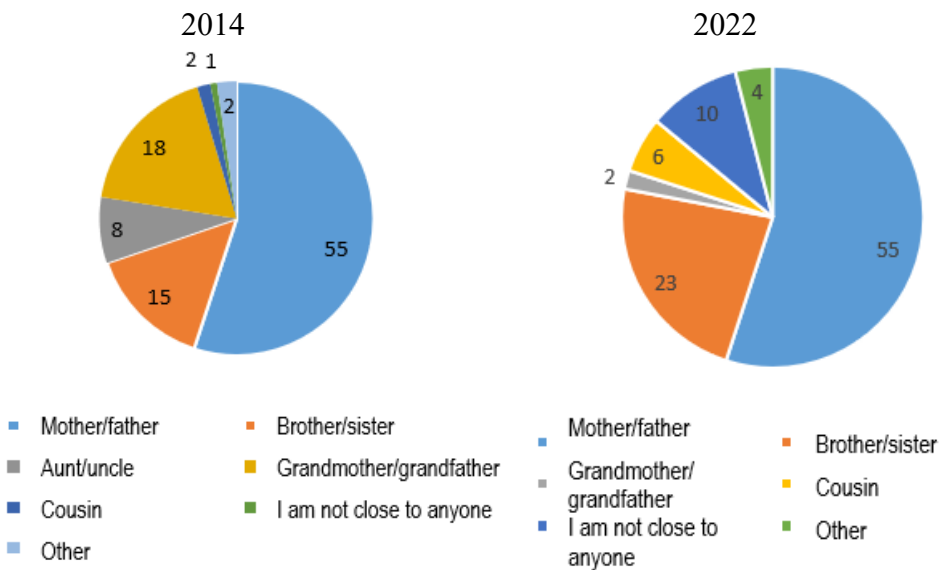
Graph 3: How do young people assess their family: the values are in %



In terms of the closeness they feel to family members, quite expectedly the respondents feel closest to the members of the closest family circle, and this is similar in both samples according to the percentage. The result obtained

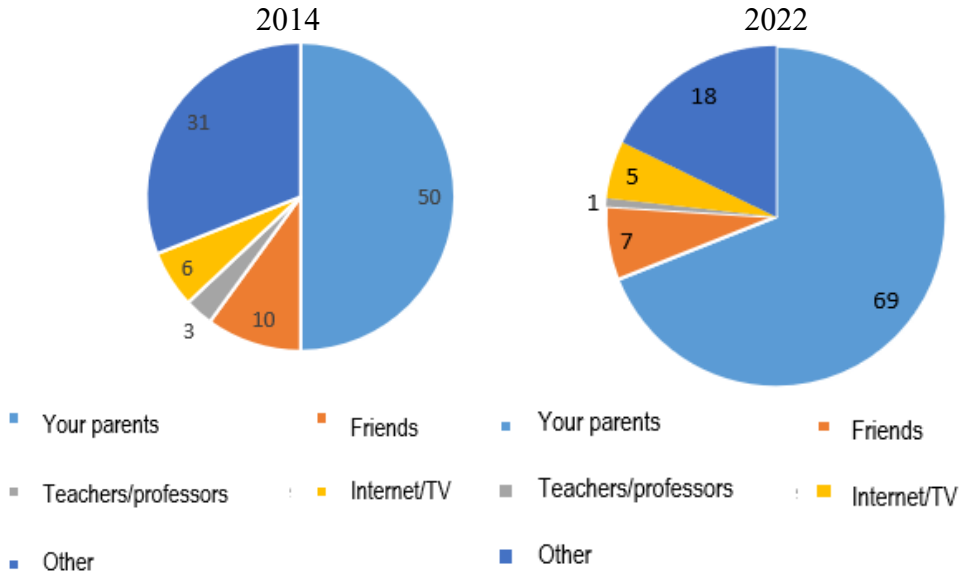
in 2022 is surprising, according to which 10% of the respondents do not feel close to any family member in the immediate or extended family. This suggests the need for additional analysis and support towards improving the family atmosphere and the possible risks that these families face. The data is presented in more detail in the next graph:

Graph 4: To which family members young people feel closest: the values are in %



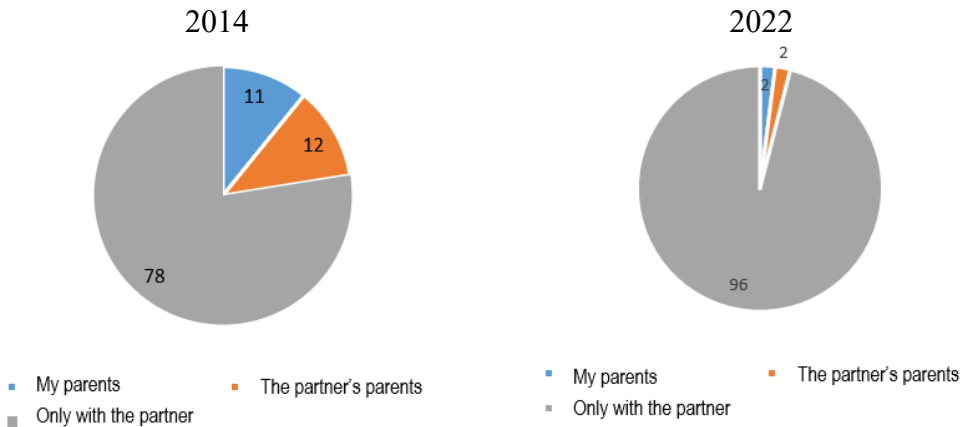
Young people usually form their attitudes about marriage and family under the influence of their parents, however in 2014 that influence was more intense, and it decreased in 2022, and if one considers that in 2022 most young people selected the option ‘Other’, it can be concluded that the influence of parents is still decreasing on the account of some other factors that should be further analyzed (Graph 5).

Graph 5: Representation of the person/s who had the most influence on the formation of attitudes: the values are in %



The transition from a traditional to a nuclear family is striking if one considers the answers of the respondents in regard to the person/s they would live with after marriage, that is, in what kind of household. As much as 96% of young people expect to live exclusively with their partner after getting married, which is significant 20% more than in 2014. The results are presented in Graph 6.

Graph 6: Representation in regard to the person young people would live with after getting married: the values are in %



Discussion

The family as a social phenomenon has followed humanity since its inception until today. Without a doubt, when we talk about the family, we are facing perhaps one of the most complex phenomena, which are more difficult to elaborate. It is a community that represents full participation of the person, cooperation, and solidarity, as the basis for cooperation and belonging and not only on a rational but also on an emotional basis (Acevski, 2017). It is also one of the fundamental communities of society as a whole, if it is taken into account that a person is born, grows, develops, lives and establishes a variety of relationships precisely within the family through which he plays the most important role, forming the personality of the individual. One of the dominant characteristics of the family is its dynamism, which is why it could never be studied as a statistical social category, a dynamism that is seen through the numerous transformations and changes in social life that have a huge impact on the family and family relations. For that reason, in certain periods of time it changed entirely, or certain phenomena related to it changed. The family has changed in response to changing ideas about love, with the result that in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the experience is quite different from that of the nineteenth century and earlier (П.Џорџ, Р., Бетк Елштајн, Џ. 2013). The findings of our research align with and contribute to the broader discourse on evolving family structures in the global context. A comparative analysis of young people's perceptions of their family of origin in 2014 and 2022 reveals trends that echo patterns observed in other societies undergoing significant

social and demographic transformations. Namely, while in the traditional society the physiognomy of the family consisted of many people from different generations, in the contemporary and modern society it consists mostly of parents and children, that is, the family gets its new structure, the nuclear family. Nuclear families are present in our study, where most of the young people are part of this family model. The average size of the households across the European Union refers to nuclear families also. According to Eurostat, in 2021, Slovakia had the highest average household size among EU member states, at 2.9 people per household. By contrast, Finland had the lowest average household size, at 1.9 people per household. The trend from 2009 to 2022 indicates a decline in the average number of people per household. This was observed in 24 out of the 27 EU Member States. Estonia experienced the most significant reduction of 0.5 members since 2009, followed by Malta, Romania, Latvia, and Lithuania, where the average household size dropped by 0.4 members. At the same time single families are on the rise all over countries in European union. According to the European Commission (2023) The number of single-person households without children in the EU increased by 30.7 % from 2009 to 2022. We can notice this trend in our study where in 2021 we have an increased number of students from single parent families.

Furthermore, we were investigating family relations and parents' influence. Our results resonate with these broader studies, reinforcing the notion that the changing structure of Macedonian families aligns with global trends influenced by urbanization, economic factors, and shifts in societal norms. The decline in the perceived influence of parents on young people's attitudes towards family life, as observed in our study, corresponds with the evolving landscape reported by Frustenberg (2019) and Rigg (2009), who explores young people's perceptions of families and experiences of family structure. Many of these assumptions suggest that young people also perceive family life as less important and that families spend less and less time together. Alongside the discussion on the weakening role of the family in young people's lives are studies showing that the role of the family and parents continues to be meaningful (e.g. when coping with the transitions) (Furlong & Cartmel 1997) Most of our students feel close to at least one family member. But there is increasing numbers of young people not feeling close to any family member compared to previous study in 2014. Positive family relationships involving warm family interactions and appropriate control have been shown to promote the psychological wellbeing of children (Amato & Fowler, 2002). Recent studies have demonstrated the relationship between family connectedness, defined as a sense of belonging and closeness to family members, and ado-lescent wellbeing (Houltberg, Henry, Merten,& Robinson, 2011). Family

connectedness directly impacts on children's functioning and influences children's abilities to connect with others. The number of young people who assessed the family as harmonious in 2022 has significantly decreased. Current research shows that there are young people who are not close to any family member, which can also be interpreted as a cold and indifferent relationship of family members. Family ties have become more unstable because of high rates of cohabitation, the instability of cohabiting unions and marriage, and the growing separation of marriage and childrearing, as Cherlin (2009) has noted.

Many public and academic discussions concerning family and family life suggest recent societal changes to have affected family life mainly in the negative (see e.g. Aapola et al. 2005, p. 81; Mestdag & Vandeweyer 2005). Our study also reports negative trends regarding family life. While further qualitative analyses is need for more clear picture on this topic our research contributes valuable insights specific to North Macedonia, it is essential to recognize the interconnectedness of these trends with global dynamics. This interplay underscores the need for holistic approaches in understanding and addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with changing family structures.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the structure of Macedonian families is changing. The changes that are taking place on a global level are evidently transferred to our country as well. Families are getting smaller, and the nuclear family is almost completely displacing the traditional model of an extended family. This tendency is especially present in urban areas. Households have increasingly fewer members, households consisting of parents and one child are becoming dominant, and it is expected that the phenomenon of "single person" households will be more prevalent in our country. Our research on young people's perceptions of their own family, or family of origin, shows changes that correspond to this situation. In both years of the research, the number of respondents who come from nuclear families is dominant. However, the increasing number of respondents who live only with their parents and with one parent, shows a tendency to narrow families and abandon the family cooperative as a traditional model of an extended family. The fact that internal relations in families have worsened is concerning, even though families are smaller and therefore are expected to be more integrated. However, the number of answers wherewith respondents evaluate their family as a conflicting family has increased. Conflicts in the family, lack of communication, warmth and closeness can lead to divorce, domestic violence, addictions, and problems in child development. The source of the youth's dissatisfaction with family life

needs to be determined in more detail. The influence of parents on the attitudes of young people about marriage and family is decreasing, and it is not clear where and how young people form such attitudes. Hence, this is an issue that needs further investigation.

The abandonment of the extended family as a model can also be observed in the non-acceptance of a marital union if it implies a household that also includes the partner's parents. Young people are not prepared to compromise and live in a family cooperative after getting married.

In general, it can be concluded that it is justified to claim that slowly but surely the dominant model of extended traditional families is being abandoned in favor of nuclear families. This paper represents an additional incentive to deepen the analysis and to qualitatively examine the perceptions of young people about the structure of the families they come from and the families they would form in the future.

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