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## Attitudes of university students towards institution of a marriage

### Abstract

*Until recently, marriage was the only socially acceptable community of two partners of different gender, with the goal of creating a family and prolonging the human race. The aim of this paper is to examine the attitudes of University students towards marriage and family. The research was based on the survey regarding the attitudes of students from the University of Novi Sad, Serbia towards institution of marriage. Collected data were analysed by using the SPSS statistical software. The main results indicate that 93.8% of respondents want to get married one day; an ideal number of children for a family to have been two (48.4%); 54.6% of respondents strongly agreed that if being in a marriage does not work properly, they should divorce. The results of these analyses and their limitations suggest guiding a future research according to different attitudes*

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*of respondents. This research provides the most ambitious and systematic analysis to date the attitudinal evidence on the attitudes of family, future children, and divorce among University students.*

*Keywords: marriage; University students; Novi Sad; Serbia*

## 1. Introduction

Marriage is a community (defined by law, formal marriages) between persons of different genders. The modern definition defines it as a social and emotional community between two adults, as a rule, of the opposite gender (Đurđev, Arsenović, Marinković 2016, p. 141). Serbia is a Balkan country, where the patriarchal system of values in the family has always been represented (Vu-jadinović 2009, p. 142), and along with globalization, the attitudes of the population of Serbia, related to marriage and family life, are gradually changing. In other countries, such as the United States, there are sudden changes in attitudes about marriage and the family, people choosing cohabitation over marriage (Pickard 2017, p. 3). How much do the environment and parents influence marriage decisions? Marriage is a part of the tradition in all cultures (Adhikari 2017, p. 170), since its inception, primarily had a role of connecting people of different genders for the sake of procreation (Encyclopedia Britannica 2020). However, since the beginning of the 21st century, attitudes related to marriage and common life have changed intensively. There are different attitudes related to marriage, they can generally be divided into two groups, positive attitudes are: love for a partner, economic security, security in old age etc., negative attitudes: marriage is only part of a tradition or an outdated custom, it is not necessary to get married to be accomplished and loved, marriage is an outdated institution, marriage is an obligation, a family can be created outside of a marriage (Blagojević 1989, p. 220). The aim of this paper is to examine the attitudes of University students about marriage and family. Today, there are numerous opportunities to achieve sexual and emotional intimacy outside of heterosexual marriage. Various forms of dyadic relationships are represented through different types of extramarital relationships to same-sex marriages (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004, p. 1217; Raymo, Iwasawa and Bumpass 2009, p. 796; Smock 2000, p. 6; Treas, Lui and Gubernskaya 2014, p. 1502).

## 2. Theoretical background

Attitudes (i.e., positive or negative opinions about marriage and its alternatives) are important for two reasons. First, they predict behaviour, albeit imperfectly. The association between attitudes and behaviour is central to a long line of theorizing which stretches from symbolic interactions (Blumer 1969, p. 20; Treas *et al.* 2014, p. 1502) through the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991, p. 180; Treas *et al.* 2014, p. 1503) to efforts to relate specific perceptions to actual marital decisions (Carroll *et al.* 2007, p. 230; Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, and Waite 1995, p. 609; Treas *et al.* 2014, p. 1503). Second, as the internalization of cultural understandings, attitudes speak to culturally based theories that motivate contemporary discussions of family change. To explain a new regime of family behaviour, the theory of the Second Demographic Transition points to the diffusion of a cultural ethos of individualism traced back to the Enlightenment (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988, p. 39; Treas *et al.* 2014, p. 1506). Reducing the need for supportive social institutions such as marriage (Esping-Andersen 1999, p. 49; Treas *et al.* 2014, p. 1506), greater material security is said to foster post-material values that valorise personal fulfilment over conformity to societal expectations. Criticizing marriage as a site of patriarchal oppression, feminist theory demands that relationships must be organized around a new moral foundation of gender equality (Treas *et al.* 2014, p. 1505).

This view of women bearing the highest burden of divorce and requiring more public and private support than their ex-partners is partly based on solid evidence. Yet, the seemingly clear picture gets clouded when put into a larger context of divorce outcomes. Divorce effects, and gender differences therein, extend into various spheres, including changes in economic status, health and well-being, domestic arrangements, and social relationships. In these domains, several studies have reported that men were more vulnerable to the adverse effects of divorce, including larger health declines and lower subjective well-being after separation (Shor *et al.* 2012, p. 47; Stack and Eshleman 1998, p. 535; Leopold T. 2018, p. 774), higher risk of adopting bad health habits (Umberson 1992, p. 914), elevated mortality (Berntsen and Kravdal 2012, p. 2267; Sbarra *et al.* 2011, p. 455; Leopold T. 2018, p. 774), disproportionate declines in satisfaction with family life (Leopold and Kalmijn 2016, p. 1722; Leopold T. 2018, p. 774), higher dissatisfaction with custodial arrangements (Bauserman 2012, p. 465; Sheets and Braver 1996, p. 337; Leopold T. 2018, p. 774), and greater feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Dykstra and Fokkema 2007, p. 10; Leopold T. 2018, p. 774). Although the evidence is not consistent about all these effects, it suggests that an assessment of gender differences in the consequences of divorce should look at multiple outcomes.

The changing gender system has changed marriage. Yet the so-called “gender revolution” has been asymmetric, changing women’s activities much more than men’s (England 2010, p. 149; England and Farkas 1986, p. 162; Sayer *et al.* 2011, p. 1984). The big change has been the dramatic increase in employment among married mothers (Blau 1998, p. 117; Cohen and Bianchi 1999, p. 25; Sayer *et al.* 2011, p. 1987). Motherhood still reduces married women’s odds of employment, but much less so than previously (Cohen and Bianchi 1999, p. 26; Sayer *et al.* 2011, p. 1987). “Most wives are employed, although when they have young children, some take time out of employment and many are employed in jobs with part-time hours” (Cohen and Bianchi 1999, p. 26; Sayer *et al.* 2011, p. 1988). Thus, expectations for women are ambiguous – they are expected to be in charge of child rearing, and “intensive mothering” is increasingly expected (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006, p. 186; Sayer *et al.* 2011, p. 1989), but norms about employment are ambivalent and inconsistent (Wilcox and Dew 2009, p. 691; Sayer *et al.* 2011, p. 2001). Mothers’ employment rose steadily until about 1990, after which it largely levelled off (Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman 2004, p. 6; Sayer *et al.* 2011, p. 1988).

Many individual characteristics may be involved in the transmission of fertility from parents to children (Anderton *et al.* 1987, p. 467; Beaujouan *et al.* 2019, p. 600). Recent research on exogenous variations in fertility based on twin instrumental variables estimates suggested that the transmission can be partly attributed to mediators or to characteristics that parents and their children share (Cools and Hart 2017, p. 29; Kolk 2015, p. 1416; Beaujouan *et al.* 2019, p. 605). Notably, one would expect the correlation in family size to be altered by socioeconomic characteristics of both the respondent and his/her parents, so it is essential to consider these factors (Murphy and Wang 2001, p. 76; Beaujouan *et al.* 2019, p. 615). First, parental characteristics can act directly on their children’s own fertility and may also act indirectly as moderators in the relationship between parental family size and child’s family size (Beaujouan *et al.* 2019, p. 606). Indeed, the magnitude of the association between parents’ and respondent’s fertility could vary depending on parental socioeconomic specificities. Second, the respondent’s characteristics directly affect own family size. A few studies have found a negative relationship between number of siblings and educational attainment, although this result is not systematic (Blake 1989, p. 33; Gary-Bobo *et al.* 2006, p. 3; Beaujouan *et al.* 2019, p. 607). Education may thus be linked to the family size and thus may act as mediator in the relationship between parental family size and child’s family size. Finally, controlling simultaneously for parent’s and child’s characteristics allows us to take into account some of the traits shared at the family level and assumed to be one of the main mechanisms behind the intergenerational transmission of fertility (Kolk 2015, p. 1416; Beaujouan *et al.* 2019, p. 615).

### 3. Methods

In this research the survey method was used. The design of the questionnaire was based on the original study, it is not based on any available research of this type. The responders were informed of the general purpose of the study and that participation is anonymous and voluntary. The research was conducted on the basis of the survey regarding the attitudes of students from University of Novi Sad, Serbia towards institution of marriage and children.

The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions divided into four segments. The first part involved items related to the socio demographic profile of the responders (gender, year of study, residence in rural or urban area and growing up with mother, father, both or none parents). The second part was consisted of 5 questions relating to number of brothers or sisters of respondents, wish of getting marry one day (if respondents answered yes, they were asked why is that in following: fear of loneliness, they will feel much better, material security, that has to be like that or other; if respondents answered no they were asked why is that: you don't believe in an institution of a marriage, you don't want commitment like that, your career is much more important or other) and they were asked if they live in an extramarital union with a girlfriend or a boyfriend. The first question of the first part was measured by using categories (one brother/sister, both, more than two and I do not have any siblings), second and fifth question contained only two categories: yes or no.

The third part of the survey included four questions referring to opinion of respondents about who has the biggest influence on the deed of getting married, how many children they want to have, why is that (categories were given to them: because I grew up with my brothers and sisters, because I was only child, because that has to be like that), and the last question of the third part was about preferable gender of their future child/children. The first and second and fourth question of the third part was measured using categories (personal choice, parents, friends, society) for first question, (none, one, two-three or more than three) for second question and finally last question contained categories: male, female, not important or other.

The fourth part of the survey included five questions about necessity to make marriage official thing, if being in a marriage does not work properly are they for divorce, divorce is the only solution if marriage does not work properly regardless to children, both parents in a marriage should be employed and at the end they were asked if parents should help them financially when being married. All questions in the fourth part were measured by using 5-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree).

The reliability of the survey was analysed using Cronbach's alpha, of which the obtained value was 0.80. Taking into account that reliability coefficients higher than 0.7 are considered satisfactory, the questionnaire has an acceptable level of reliability. The final number of correctly completed questionnaires was 500.

The obtained data were analysed using version 23 of the SPSS statistical program. The most common statistical analyses that have been applied in this research include: an initial descriptive statistical analysis followed by the t-test analysis for independent samples, and the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). In order to determine how significant the difference was among individual groups, the post-hoc Scheffe test was used as one of the most rigorous and most commonly applied tests. The t-test of independent samples was applied in order to compare the responses of two groups of respondents: male and female and their residence in rural or urban area. The one-way analysis of variance, ANOVA, was used to examine the effect of participants' social characteristics (gender, year of study, residence in rural or urban area and growing up with one, both or none parents) on their responses to items related to institution of a marriage.

#### 4. Results

The study consisted of 500 respondents of different sociodemographic characteristics. Gender distribution among respondents shows that the vast majority are female 71% (355 respondents) and live in an urban area (70.6%). The year of study at which University students were enrolled was yet another parameter that was observed in the research. Third-year students had the highest proportion in the year of study with 43.4%, followed with second-year students with 22.2%, first-year students 22%, fourth year students 7.2% and finally fifth year students with only 5.2%. The highest % of respondents grew up with both parents (89.2%) or 446 of respondents, followed by respondents who grew up just with mother (7.2%), just with father (2.4%), without parents just 0.4% and other 0.8% of respondents (Table 1).

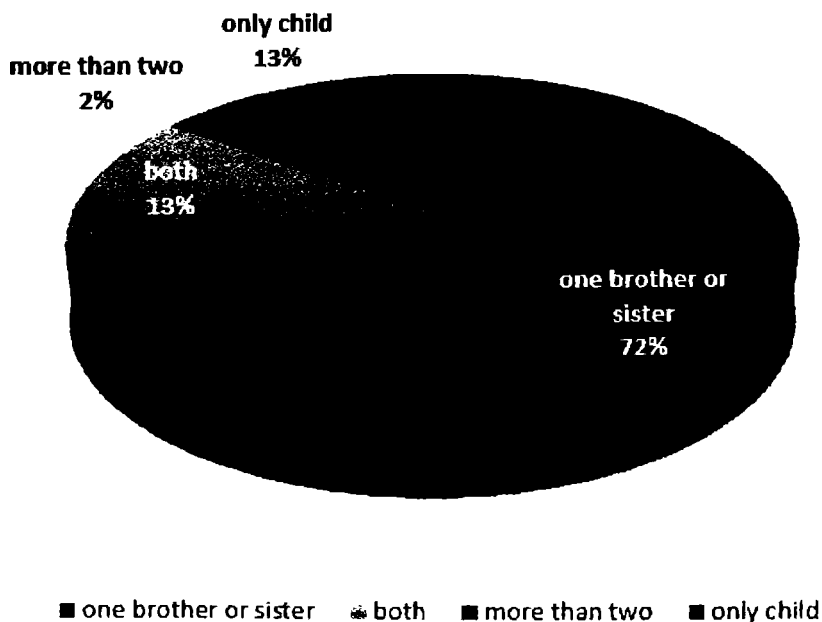
The majority of respondents 72.2% (N=361) answered that they have one brother or sister, followed by respondents with both brother and sister 13% (N=65), respondents who do not have any sibling 12.6% (N=63) and the least number of respondents have more than two brothers or sisters (2.2%) (Figure 1).

About 93.8% of respondents answered that they want to get married one day. About 469 respondents were then asked why they want to get marry and 43.9% answered that they would feel much better, followed by 28.6% of respondents

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N=500).

| Characteristics                 |       |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| <i>Gender</i>                   |       |
| Male                            | 29%   |
| Female                          | 71%   |
| <i>Year of study</i>            |       |
| I                               | 22%   |
| II                              | 22.2% |
| III                             | 43.4% |
| IV                              | 7.2%  |
| V                               | 5.2%  |
| <i>Residence</i>                |       |
| Urban                           | 70.6% |
| Rural                           | 29.4% |
| <i>Respondents grew up with</i> |       |
| Both parents                    | 89.2% |
| With mother                     | 7.2%  |
| With father                     | 2.4%  |
| Without parents                 | 0.4%  |
| Other                           | 0.8%  |

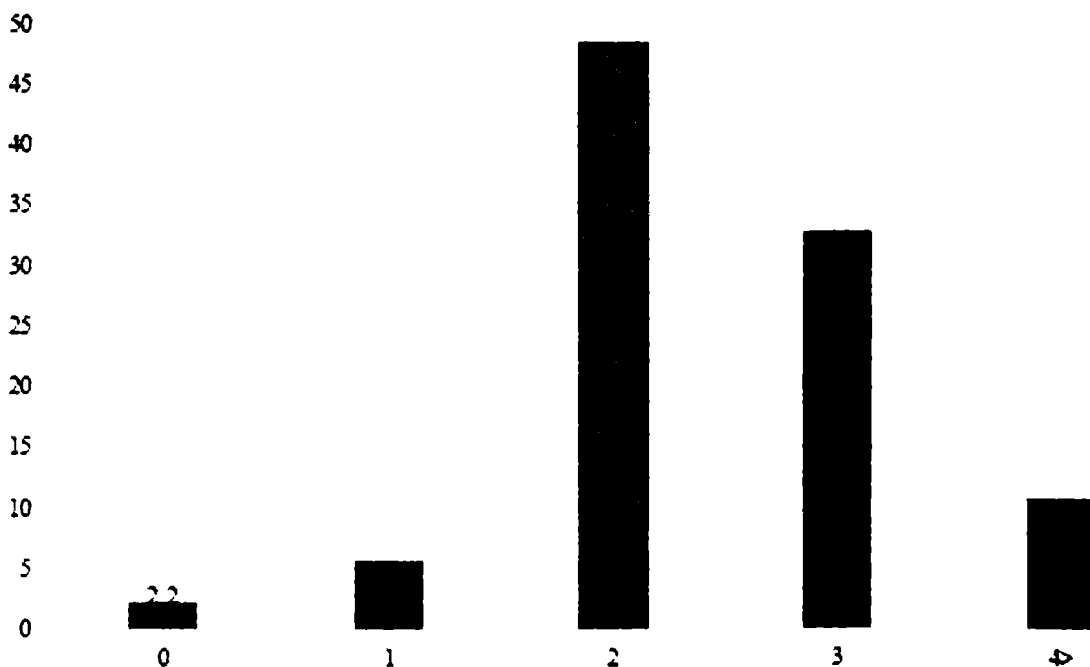
Figure 1. Number of brothers and sisters of respondents (N=500)



who said its none of that, 17.9% said that it has to be like that, 6% answered that they want to marry because of fear of loneliness and the least number of respondents 3.6% or 17 respondents answered that it's because of material security. About 67.7% (N=31) respondents who answered that they don't want to get marry said that that's because they don't believe in an institution of a marriage followed by 19.4% of respondents who said that they don't want commitment like that and the least number of respondents 12.9% answered that career is much more important.

According to the respondent's opinion who has the biggest influence on the deed of getting married, 90.4% of respondents answered that it was their personal choice, followed 7.4% who answered that the biggest influence has society on their opinion and the least number 2.2% answered that it was their parents, who have the biggest influence. None of respondents answered that friends have big influence on the deed of getting married. The majority 89.9% (N=449) of University students answered that they didn't live in some kind of extramarital union with a girlfriend or a boyfriend and the rest 10.2% said that they lived. An ideal number of children for a family to have is according to 242 University respondents is two (48.4%) and the least number of children according to only 2.2% is none (Figure 2). When asked why 50.2% of respondents answered that its some other reason, following 27.4% who said that's because they grew up with many brothers and sisters, 13.8% answered it's because that has to be like that, and the least number of respondents (8.6%) said that it's because they were only child in a family.

Figure 2. Desired number of children (%)



About 80.6% of respondents answered that they don't care about a gender of their future child, following 54 respondents or 10.8% who would like to have the male and the least number of respondents only 8.6% want the female.

According to Table 2. exactly 24.2% of respondents agreed that it was necessary to make a marriage an official thing. Also 273 or 54.6% of respondents strongly agreed that if being in a marriage does not work properly, they should divorce. Meanwhile, 34.2% of respondents strongly agreed that divorce is the only solution if marriage does not work properly regardless to children. More than half respondents (53.4%) strongly agreed that both people in a marriage should be employed. Interesting is that 46.4% of respondents strongly disagreed that parents should help them financially when married.

Table 2. Marriage and Divorce

| Statements/questions   | Average answers | Strongly disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neutral (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
|--|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|--------------------|
| It's necessary to make a marriage official thing.                                      | 3.3             | 20.2%                 | 12.2%        | 11.6%       | 31.8%     | 24.2%              |
| If being in a marriage does not work properly, you should divorce.                     | 4.2             | 4.0%                  | 7.0%         | 4.8%        | 29.6%     | 54.6%              |
| Divorce is the only solution if marriage does not work properly regardless to children | 3.7             | 11.0%                 | 13.0%        | 8.0%        | 33.8%     | 34.2%              |
| Both people in a marriage should be employed   | 4.1             | 6.0%                  | 7.2%         | 6.2%        | 27.2%     | 53.4%              |
| Parents should help you financially when you are married.                              | 2.1             | 46.4%                 | 18.2%        | 13%         | 18.8%     | 3.6%               |

The t-test of independent samples was applied to compare the responses of two population groups (gender and residence in a rural or urban areas). Only the results showing statistical relevance at the level of significance  $p < 0.05$  are presented in this paper. The statistically significant difference in the answers of male and female respondents is noticeable in eight out of eleven tested statements (Table 3). The difference between answers of female and male respondents is noticeable in questions relating to having a brother or sister, getting married one day, lived in extramarital union, ideal number of children, gender of ideal children, divorce if marriage does not work, both parents should be employed, and divorce is the only solution if marriage does not work regardless to children.

Table 3. The results of the t-test for the male and female respondents

| Item   | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--|----------|----------|
| Do you have brother or sister?   | 6.206    | 0.013    |
| Would you like to get marry one day?   | 6.376    | 0.012    |
| Did you live in some kind of extramarital union with a girl-friend or a boyfriend?     | 4.447    | 0.035    |
| How many children would you like to have?  | 11.501   | 0.001    |
| You would like that your children be:  | 32.494   | 0.000    |
| If being in a marriage does not work properly, you should divorce.                     | 19.060   | 0.000    |
| Divorce is the only solution if marriage does not work properly regardless to children | 10.896   | 0.001    |
| Both people in a marriage should be employed   | 6.206    | 0.013    |

Note: \**p* is significant at the level  $p < 0.05$

The statistically significant difference in the answers of the respondents from an urban and rural areas is noticeable in two out of eleven tested statements (Table 4). The difference between answers of respondents living in an urban or rural area is noticeable in questions related to getting marry one day and who has the biggest influence on deed of getting married.

Table 4. The results of the t-test for the respondents from urban and rural area

| Item  | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---|----------|----------|
| Would you like to get marry one day?  | 9.970    | 0.002    |
| According to your opinion who has the biggest influence on the deed of getting married? | 4.564    | 0.033    |

Note: \**p* is significant at the level  $p < 0.05$

The analysis of the variance, ANOVA, was implemented in order to determine the statistically significant differences between answers given by the respondent's year of study, growing up with mother, father, both or none parents. Only the results showing statistical relevance at the level of significance  $p < 0.05$  are presented in this paper. The statistically significant difference in the answers of the respondents of the different years of study is noticeable in one out of eleven tested statements (Table 5).

Table 5. The results of the analysis of variance, ANOVA, for the year of study of respondents

| Item  | F     | <i>p</i> |
|---|-------|----------|
| Parents should help you financially when you are married. | 2.436 | 0.046    |

Note: \**p* is significant at the level  $p < 0.05$

The statistically significant difference in the answers of the respondents who grew up with both, mother, father, without parents is noticeable in four out of eleven tested statements (Table 6).

Table 6. The results of the analysis of variance, ANOVA, for the respondents who grew up with both parents, mother, father or without parents

| Item  | F     | <i>p</i> |
|---|-------|----------|
| Do you have brother or sister?  |       |          |
| Did you live in some kind of extramarital union with a girlfriend or a boyfriend? | 6.277 | 0.000    |
| If being in a marriage does not work properly, you should divorce.                | 1.227 | 0.298    |
| Both people in a marriage should be employed                                      | 2.738 | 0.028    |
|   | 2.526 | 0.040    |

Note: \**p* is significant at the level  $p < 0.05$

## 5. Discussion

This study was initiated to provide an exploration of marriage, family and parenthood preferences among University students in Novi Sad, Serbia. The analyses provide an unique view into the preferences of University students, concerning marriage and parenthood, and also illustrate some of the tangible differences between the preferences of women and men and place of residence. Overall, the young women and men within this University sample expressed a relatively strong desire to marry. The findings suggest that the respondents prefer having two children in future, which supports some findings of OECD countries with available data that mean personal ideal number of children for men is just under 2.2 and for women around 2.3, slightly above the population replacement rate level of 2.1 children per woman (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009).

The results of the t-test show that the respondents of different gender and place of residence have significantly different opinion of getting married one day. That is not a surprise because women are slightly more likely than men to

say yes, if they plan to spend the rest of their lives together. This finding is close to the results of Popenoe and Whitehead (2004) which found that 85% of adults in the United States desired to marry. Fallahchai and Fallahi also reveal in their study in 2019, that 90.2% of University participants in their study tend to marry. On the other hand, this finding is not consistent with the results of Braaten and Rosén (1998) and Larson *et al.* (1998) reporting no gender differences in this area. University students, who were asked are not only marrying and having children later in life than previous generations but taking more time to get to know each other before they marry. Indeed, some spend the better part of a decade as friends or romantic partners before marrying. The results also support several specific theoretical ideas that have been advanced in previous research about gender differences in divorce. Survey shows that respondents of different gender have different opinion when it comes to divorce.

T-test shows that there is a significant difference in opinion of respondents living in rural or urban area and different gender relating to employment of a man and a woman in a marriage. The analysis of the variance, ANOVA, shows that there are statistically significant differences between answers given by the respondents who grew up with single parent, no parent or both parents towards the number of their children. Also, differences were noticeable in the year of study of respondents' answers relating to financially help of parents to students when married. This is not a surprise because students of higher year of study are mostly not dependent of parents financially and don't want their help.

University students later marry in relation to their peers who have completed their education. The reasons are the desire for independence, including independence from parental money (this is exactly what the research results showed); educated young people generally do not want to live in a community, to achieve that they must have their own source of income, but few still have a job during their studies, because it is extremely difficult to combine study and work, especially family with all the above. However, not all respondents want to get married one day. The main reason is that some students do not believe in the institution of marriage, it can be related to the situation in their family, a certain % of them grew up with only one parent.

## 6. Conclusion

The family is the pillar of every society. Definitions written throughout history have indicated that marriage is the only legitimate and acceptable way that leads to the formation of a family between persons of different gender, that is,

a socially acceptable form of cohabitation. Today, in the 21st century, community, family, partnerships, are not necessarily contemplated through the prism of marriage. Free will is much more prevalent among young people than it was just half a century ago. In this regard, individuals choose to form a family within an extramarital union. In the past, individuals who had children out of wedlock were considered immoral, but today more and more people have a family and children without being married. Marriages between same-sex partners are becoming more common.

This research provides the most ambitious and systematic analysis to date the attitudinal evidence on the attitudes of family, future children, and divorce among University students. Unsurprisingly, given the large sample sizes, these results are highly significant, but the extent of attitude change is usually quite modest. Different countries, different attitude items, or different years might well have led to different conclusions. The results of these analyses and their limitations suggest guiding a future research according to different attitudes of respondents.

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