

## Importance of the Institution of Marriage for Polish and Slovak Students

### Abstract

The article presents a selected aspect of broader sociological empirical research into the issues of family and the phenomenon of cohabitation conducted among the students of the University of Constantine the Philosopher in the Republic of Slovakia and of the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. The presented analysis of the survey research results focuses on the determination of the importance of the institution of marriage for the youth belonging to academic environment. The results of the research have proven that in spite of the increasing level of liberalisation of marriage and family life a large percentage of students both from Poland and Slovakia perceived marriage as a valuable institution of high importance to the questioned individuals.

**Keywords:** *family, marriage, cohabitation.*

### Introduction

Family constitutes one of the basic social institutions in all societies and, as was rightfully stated by E. Durkheim, it is an institution within which individuals feel socially integrated and that is crucial for the welfare both of the family itself and of society (cf., B. Powell, C. Bolzendahl, C. Geist, L.C. Steelman, 2010, p.1). Moreover, as stated by W. Świątkiewicz (W. Świątkiewicz, 1998, p. 10) family also constitutes “the smallest and simultaneously the most important particle of social life”. Throughout centuries it has been assumed that families are responsible for the production, distribution and consumption of goods and also for the reproduction

and socialisation of the subsequent generations. It was also believed that families not only pass down possessions, but also cultural assets, they provide biological, social and cultural continuity (a. Kwak, 2005, p. 9).

Both common-sense observations and scientific research, frequently interdisciplinary in character, indicate enormous changes occurring in the most important area of social life, which is family. A. Giddens (A. Giddens, 2010), A. Toffler (A. Toffler, 1986), U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim (U. Beck, E. Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) claim that we are witnessing a global resolution occurring in nearly all corners of the world. Obviously the intensity of the occurring changes depends on multiple social and economic determinants (mainly the level of economic development), as well as religious and cultural ones. There are barely a few countries in the world where the discussion concerning the changing forms of marital life, decomposition or evolution of family in a new direction – generally the future of family is not being held. The transformations of family, the differentiation of its forms and the exposure of the emphasis on the quality of relations, familiarity, intimacy and sexuality undoubtedly constitute a challenge both to societies and to their social policies as we are faced with the emerging of new subjects and new areas of family life, which previously were not affected by the functioning of family. These transformations trigger a vibrant social discourse between the supporters of the liberalization of marital and family life and the opponents thereof – the conservatives. The characteristic, broadly understood transformations of contemporary societies have a considerable influence – which will become even more intensive – on the socio-psychological and demographic image of family (K. Slany, 2006, pp. 13–14).

Currently, family undergoes, and will undergo in the future, transformations due to the fact that the social reality within which we function also undergoes constant changes – the norms and values as well as their hierarchy change. Also, social opinions tend to change and society demonstrates an increasingly more liberal attitude towards new social phenomena (such as cohabitation, living alone, single-parenthood, divorce, remarrying). The development of economy in Poland and Slovakia, as well as in other Western European countries, in the Scandinavian countries and the United States of America, alongside the continuously occurring processes of industrialisation, IT implementation, urbanisation and the decreasing attachment to religious values result in the fact that the transformations occurring within family will be continuous in their character. The more urbanised and industrialised a society is, the larger the changes (more liberal and individualistic attitude, freedom-oriented – possibility to choose) we will observe within family.

Hence a question arises: What is the importance of the institution of marriage for young people in relation to the transformations of family? Is marriage an old-fashioned institution which gives way to liberal forms of marital and family life such as cohabitation? Or is marriage still of high importance to young people? Will young people from Poland and Slovakia enter into marriages relatively frequently in comparison with their peers from Scandinavian countries despite the progressing secularisation and liberalisation of family life? This issue has been subjected to analysis in the empirical survey research concerning family and the cohabitation phenomenon.

### **Methodological assumptions**

The comparative research was conducted among the students of various majors and various years both at Silesian University in Katowice (Poland) and the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra (Slovakia). The survey research was conducted among the test group of the total number of 1237 students from Poland and Slovakia. The realisation of this international research was possible thanks to the fact that the author was granted a scholarship from the Visegard Fund.

The basic tool used during the research was a survey questionnaire (L.A. Gruszczyński, 1999) containing 43 questions, introduction with information on the purpose of the research and the personal data section including social and demographic data of the surveyed individuals. The tool questions were formulated in compliance with the position of P. Daniłowicz and P. Sztabiński (P. Daniłowicz, P. B. Sztabiński, 1986, pp. 60–85), who believe that detailed questions should be used as they allow for obtaining more credible results/replies than global questions.

At the initial stage of the research the tested group was selected purposefully and at the subsequent stage the surveyed individuals were selected randomly. The purposeful selection referred to the choice of the community of students from two state-owned universities, namely the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra and the University of Silesia in Katowice; the students were from similar departments and studied similar majors. The sociological diagnosis consisted in obtaining data on the opinions and attitudes of the students of the first and third years of the first cycle studies and of the second year of the second cycle studies of the following majors: sociology, pedagogy, political science, mathematics, physics, computer science, technical education/information technology and occupational health and safety in Poland and Slovakia. Yet, the selection of individuals from among the students of the above-mentioned departments and years was performed

randomly in such a manner that the members of selected detailed test groups had a similar set of certain features within the analysed class. These features included: sex, age, place of residence and the frequency of participation in religious practices. Similar test groups were selected to facilitate the empirical diagnostic research of comparative character.

The gathered data has undergone statistical analysis with the use of the statistical software SPSS. The collected research material proved sufficient to allow for the performance of analyses and to search for answers to the formulated research questions.

### **Analysis of research results**

The analysis of the results of the conducted research showed that marriage is and will be of great importance for the tested students from both countries – such an opinion was expressed by 70.6% of the total number of students. Surprisingly enough, the Slovak students proved to be more decided about this issue (77.3%) than their Polish counterparts (64.2%). Despite the fact that Slovak society is more liberal (cf., R. Inglehart, Ch. Wenzel, 2010, p. 72) than Polish one and the tested students more frequently approve of cohabitation relationships, which may indicate that in their awareness the institution of marriage is slowly losing its importance, they still more often tend to consider this institution as a valuable one. From the statistical analysis it seems clear that the differences in the percentage value between the Polish and Slovak students in the scope of the perception of the institution of marriage are characterised by a high level of statistical importance (the results of the test  $\chi^2=26.501$ ;  $df=2$ :  $p=0.000$ ) (cf., Table 1). On the basis of the research entitled The European Values Survey (L. Halman, R. Luijkx, M. Zundert, 2005, p. 30) it can be concluded that 90% of Polish society do not agree with the statement that ‘marriage is unfashionable’. However, for Slovak society this percentage is slightly lower as it fluctuates around 85%. The above-mentioned percentage values are very similar, therefore on such a basis it can be assumed that the institution of marriage is and will be of great importance to the examined individuals. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that the research entitled The European Values Survey (L. Halman, R. Luijkx, M. Zundert, 2005, p 30) was conducted among a test group of representatives of a given society and nearly a decade has lapsed since the performance of the said examination, hence the results of both types of research may vary. Still we need to bear in mind the fact that the contemporary young generation is the one that will have the biggest influence on the formation of family and demographic behaviours.

**Table 1.** Importance of the institution of marriage in the contemporary world vs. the country of residence

Importance of marriage in the contemporary world:		Country		Total
		Poland	Slovakia	
It is an old-fashioned institution	N	82	57	139
	%	12.9%	9.5%	11.2%
It is and will be of considerable importance	N	407	466	873
	%	64.2%	77.3%	70.6%
I have no opinion	N	145	80	225
	%	22.9%	13.3%	18.2%
Total	N	634	603	1237
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: own research and calculations

International research conducted in seven countries of various cultures and different levels of economic development (namely Chile, Spain, South Korea, Lithuania, Germany, Poland and Ukraine) in the period between 2004 and 2006 at the initiative of F.W. Bush and W-D. Scholz, in Poland conducted by L. Dyczewski and J. Szukich-Kałuża (L. Dyczewski, 2009, p. 76) also indicates the fact that marriage is ranked among the highest values desired by the youth alongside family. In spite of the fact that within the recent decades, especially in highly developed countries, marriage has become a relatively fragile and unstable institution as confirmed by the ever growing divorce rates and increasingly popular and socially accepted forms of living such as single life, living apart together (LAT) and cohabitation relationships, the vast majority of the young generation wants to live within marriage and therefore enter into one. This research also shows that for the examined youth marriage is and will be of great importance. Marriage proved most important for the Koreans (85.0%) and the Lithuanians (83.3%). The Poles were ranked as third among the examined nationalities and the percentage value of those believing in the high importance of the institution of marriage amounted to 78.6%. The most divided opinions in this area were manifested by the Spanish, among whom 38% qualified marriage as an institution of high importance, while an almost equally large number, 41.0%, declared lack of opinion on the matter and 21% stated it was an old-fashioned institution (cf., Table 2).

The research conducted by P. Biernat and T. Sobierajski (T. Biernat, P Sobierajski, 2007, p. 62) also proves that the examined youth approved of the institution of marriage and declared that it is currently of great importance for them and will continue to be so in the future (73.4%).

In the conducted research the women, who constituted 73 % of the examined group, proved to be much more decided in this question than the men – 66.2%. Thus, the statistical analysis of the conducted research shows that the institution of marriage is of greater importance to women than to men.

**Table 2.** Importance of marriage in the contemporary world

Importance of marriage in the contemporary world	Country				
	Poland	Germany	Spain	South Korea	Lithuania
It is an old-fashioned institution	6.8%	13.9%	21.0%	7.0%	3.4%
It is and will be of great importance	78.6%	69.4	38.0%	85.0%	83.3%
I have no opinion	14.6%	16.8%	41.0%	8.0%	13.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Research conducted by L. Dyczewski and *Familienvorstellungen zwischen Fortschrittlichkeit Und Beharrung*. Hrsg. F.W. Busch, W.-D. Scholz, Würzburg: Ergon 2006 (See: L. Dyczewski, 2009, p 77).

Similarly, in the research conducted by P. Biernat and T. Sobierajski (T. Biernat, P. Sobierajski, 207, pp. 62–63), women more frequently than men attributed great importance to marriage. In our own research, a considerable percentage of men declared lack of opinion on that matter (19.9%). More men (13.9%) than women (9.3%) expressed the opinion that marriage is an old-fashioned institution. On this basis we may conclude that men are more liberal and open to new forms of marital and family life. These differences are characterised by a high level of statistical importance (the result of the test  $\chi^2=9.648$ ;  $df=2$ :  $p=0.008$ ) (cf., Table 3).

**Table 3.** The importance of marriage in the contemporary world vs. sex

Importance of marriage in the contemporary world:		Sex		Total
		female	male	
It is an old-fashioned institution	N	67	72	139
	%	9.3%	13.9%	11.2%
It is and will be of considerable importance	N	531	342	873
	%	73.8%	66.2%	70.6%
I have no opinion	N	122	103	225
	%	16.9%	19.9%	18.2%
Total	N	720	517	1237
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: own research and calculations

Moreover, statistically important differences between different age groups of students have been observed (test result  $\chi^2=17.019$   $df=4$ ;  $p=0.002$ ). The largest differences were noticed between the 18–19 and 20–22 age groups, which was excellently manifested by the result of the conducted NIR test (cf., Table 5). The majority of students who believed that marriage is and will be of great importance to individuals belonged to the 20 to 22 age group (74.8%). On the other hand, the students of the youngest age group (between 18 and 20) more frequently than the other students declared that marriage is an old-fashioned institution (15.8%) (cf., Table 4).

**Table 4.** The importance of marriage in the contemporary world vs. age

Importance of marriage in the contemporary world:	Age			Total	
	18–19	20–22	23–25		
It is an old-fashioned institution	N	30	70	39	139
	%	15.8%	9.9%	11.5%	11.2%
It is and will be of considerable importance	N	121	529	223	873
	%	63.7%	74.8%	65.6%	70.6%
I have no opinion	N	39	108	78	225
	%	20.5%	15.3%	22.9%	18.2%
Total	N	190	707	340	1237
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: own research and calculations

**Table 5.** NIR test conducted between dependent variable: the importance of marriage in the contemporary world and the independent variable: age of the tested individuals

NIR Test	Importance	
age 18–19	20–22	0.006
	23–25	0.067
age 20–22	18–19	0.006
	23–25	0.061
age 23–25	18–19	0.067
	20–22	0.061

Source: own research and calculations

The frequency of participation in religious practices tended to be an independent variable which indicated differences with a high level of statistical importance between the categories of individuals declaring various frequency of participation

in religious practices or their lack in relation to the institution of marriage (test result  $\chi^2=106.230$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p=0.000$ ; Cramer's  $V =0.207$ ). The following relation may be concluded from the analysis of the research results: the less frequent the participation in religious practices, the higher the percentage of the respondents considering marriage as an old-fashioned institution. The results of the conducted research indicated that every fifth student who does not participate in religious practices considered marriage to be old-fashioned (20.9%). Subsequently, the more frequent the participation in religious practices, the larger the number of the students believing that marriage is and will continue to be of considerable importance to individuals (cf., Table 6).

**Table 6.** Importance of marriage in the contemporary world vs. participation in religious practices

Importance of marriage in the contemporary world:	Participation in religious practices					Total	
	several times a week	once a week	once or twice a month	several times a year	I don't participate		
It is an old-fashioned institution	N	2	17	8	34	78	139
	%	3.4%	5.5%	6.8%	9.0%	20.9%	11.2%
It is and will be of considerable importance	N	52	264	94	263	200	873
	%	88.1%	85.2%	79.7%	69.8%	53.6%	70.6%
I have no opinion	N	5	29	16	80	95	225
	%	8.5%	9.4%	13.6%	21.2%	25.5%	18.2%
Total	N	59	310	118	377	373	1237
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: own research and calculations

The results of the conducted research show that the students living in big cities and small towns, as well as those living in the country did not have a uniform attitude to the question of whether marriage is an old-fashioned institution or whether it still is of great importance. The respondents were divided into three groups: one group believed that marriage is of great importance, the second that it is an old-fashioned institution, and the third group had no opinion on the matter. However, the students living in big cities most frequently considered marriage to be an old-fashioned institution; this opinion was shared by 51.8% of the respondents. The reasons for it might include, among other things, the urbanisation process, higher popularity and common occurrence of the phenomenon of cohabitation,



the greater importance of liberal values for the residents of large cities, larger openness, tolerance and acceptance of alternative forms of marital and family life (cf., Table 7). Thus, the place of residence constitutes an independent variable which in a statistically important manner differentiates the opinions of students in this area (test result  $\chi^2=22.567$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.000$ ).

The major area of studying proved to be an independent variable which indicated a considerable statistical difference in the perception of the institution of marriage manifested by the examined students (test result  $\chi^2=35.532$ ;  $df=14$ ;  $p=0.001$ ;  $V$  Cramer=0.120). The greatest percentage of the students who declared that marriage is and will be of great importance was constituted by the students of pedagogy (82.7%) and mathematics (75.2%). The percentages of the students of other departments fluctuated around 70% and 60%. Almost a third of the students of physics (28.3%) and computer science (31.7%) expressed no opinion on this matter (cf., Table 8).

**Table 7.** Importance of marriage in the contemporary world vs. place of residence

Importance of marriage in the contemporary world:	Place of residence			Total	
	big city (N>50 000)	small town (N<50 000)	country-side		
It is an old-fashioned institution	N	72	45	22	139
	%	51.8%	32.4%	15.8%	100.0%
It is and will be of considerable importance	N	369	237	267	873
	%	42.3%	27.1%	30.6%	100.0%
I have no opinion	N	113	70	42	225
	%	50.2%	31.1%	18.7%	100.0%
Total	N	554	352	331	1237
	%	44.8%	28.5%	26.8%	100.0%

Source: own research and calculations

**Table 8.** Importance of marriage in the contemporary world vs. field of studying

Field of study	Importance of marriage in the contemporary world:			Total	
	It is an old-fashioned institution	It is and will be of great importance	I have no opinion		
sociology	N	20	113	29	162
	%	12.3%	69.8%	17.9%	100.0%
pedagogy	N	16	186	23	225
	%	7.1%	82.7%	10.2%	100.0%

Field of study	Importance of marriage in the contemporary world:			Total	
	It is an old-fashioned institution	It is and will be of great importance	I have no opinion		
political science	N	28	155	43	226
	%	12.4%	68.6%	19.0%	100.0%
physics	N	6	27	13	46
	%	13.0%	58.7%	28.3%	100.0%
mathematics	N	15	100	18	133
	%	11.3%	75.2%	13.5%	100.0%
Information technology	N	5	38	20	63
	%	7.9%	60.3%	31.7%	100.0%
OHS	N	19	107	26	152
	%	12.5%	70.4%	17.1%	100.0%
Computer science	N	30	147	53	230
	%	13.0%	63.9%	23.0%	100.0%
Total	N	139	873	225	1237
	%	11.2%	70.6%	18.2%	100.0%

Source: own research and calculations

## **Summary**

To sum up we need to conclude that in spite of the ever greater liberalisation of marital and family life a large percentage of students both from Poland and Slovakia believes that marriage constituted a valuable institution of high importance. Within the structure of the tested individuals in terms of sex, the women more frequently than the men expressed the opinion that marriage is of great importance and will be so in the future. Thus, despite the growing social acceptance and common occurrence of alternative forms of marital and family life, such as cohabitation relationships, marriage is still ranked very highly among the values respected by academic youth of Poland and Slovakia and they attribute high importance to this institution. The conducted research also indicates that the examined students will precede entering into marriage with cohabitation, which is mostly due to the fact that the latter offers a possibility to get to know each other better doing daily activities and chores, thus also verifying the strength of the relationship in critical situations. Similarly, even though the institution of marriage has ceased to constitute a stable relationship, which is reflected by high divorce rates, young people from Poland and Slovakia are still willing to choose living in a formalised relationship

offering a greater sense of safety for both parties and simultaneously providing a vast variety of legal benefits in their countries in comparison with the cohabitation relationships. The attractiveness and huge importance of the institution of marriage for the examined students also results from the national configurations of accepted social and cultural values in Poland and Slovakia, where the institution of marriage is still of great importance due to the high level of religiousness of the societies in comparison with the societies of Western Europe and Scandinavia.

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