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Shifting Perspectives on Marriage and Gender Roles: Qualitative Research Among Urban Serbian Youth

Considering the demographic context, marriage remains the dominant form of partnership for creating a family life in Serbia despite the growing influence of modern cohabitation trends. The decision to marry and start a family has been postponed. According to the 2022 Census, approximately 60% of women and almost 40% of men aged 30-34 were unmarried, and almost 40% of young people 20-34 of those who have "become independent" live alone. Based on qualitative research, we analysed young people`s attitudes and perceptions of gender roles and gender relations in heterosexual partnerships in Serbia as relevant factors that can significantly impact community stability and decisions related to parenthood and childbirth. The intention was to see whether there are differences in the perspectives of females and males and whether these perspectives shape their behavior. In 2024, interviews were administered with 25 unmarried men and women under 35 in urban areas. Interviews with the respondents led to an ambiguous interpretation of gender roles, both for men and women, through the prism of traditional and contemporary ones. Females showed a greater interest in these issues, while young males showed an understanding of modern processes and a willingness to accept them with a common desire to overcome gender differences through communication, agreement and mutual respect. The young people observed that respect for gender equality is one of the prerequisites for the quality and survival of a relationship and marital formation, at the same time indicating that the transformation processes of gender roles within the family also imply the support of the broad social community, which is most needed when it comes to the complex relationship between family life and work. Although women's employment is not only perceived as an additional important source of income, but there is also an understanding among interviewees that housework and childcare are more the responsibility of women. Education on partnership and gender equality would contribute to raising awareness among young women and men bringing them closer together and easing misunderstandings, which would be a positive framework for further decisions that could have positive demographic effects.

Keywords: Gender roles, partnership, family formation, young people, Serbia