



THE EVOLUTION OF THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE. LEGAL REFLECTIONS, SOCIAL PHENOMENA AND METAMORPHOSES OF INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTION

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Abstract

The present study addresses a topical and interdisciplinary topic (couple psychology and family law), investigating how contemporary social phenomena shape young people's perceptions, attitudes and beliefs regarding the institution of marriage. The research design is quasi-experimental, with a sample of 57 participants ($m = 22.46$). In the initial phase a battery of questionnaires (Marital Intention Scale, Marital Expectations Scale, Marital Attitude Scale, Relationship Beliefs Inventory, Romantic Beliefs Scale) and a semi-structured interview were applied. Descriptive data revealed strong heterogeneity regarding the ideal age for marriage (with an average of years and a major concentration at the 25-year threshold) and high scores on indicators of romantic idealism. However, the baseline data also revealed a deficit of legal knowledge and a worrying presence of legislative myths, with young people evaluating the reflection of these themes in society as being totally "insufficiently addressed". Starting from the needs of young people, an intervention was carried out, and the post-intervention results confirmed the efficiency of the applied program.

Keywords: *intention to marry, age, gender, parental models, legal knowledge about marriage*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over time, marriage has undergone several transformations depending on the socio-economic development contexts of the world but also on the role it played in society. Thus, patterns of marriage specific to time periods are noteworthy. We note here two of the theorists in the field, namely Stanger-Ross, Collins & Stern (2005) and Cherlin (2004). Stanger-Ross et al. (2005) identify three distinct periods determinate by household membership of the family of origin: reciprocity (1900-1950), dependence (1950-1970) and autonomy (1970-2000). Dependence on the family of origin influenced the decision to marry in the sense that being

less autonomous in relation to the family and often sharing the living space with it, it was necessary to consider all the implications of this cohabitation. As the years passed, around the middle of the 20th century, young people began to marry later and thus their degree of autonomy was greater, as a result their decision was less influenced by their family of origin. Cherlin (2004) also delimits a period in terms of the. Traditions and significance. Of marriage, and thus, we have at the beginning of the 20th century, institutionalized marriage was the predominant model, then it was replaced by companionship and then by individualized marriage. In the first category, love ties are secondary, marriage being an institution with a clearly delimited role. Young people find satisfaction in this union and in fulfilling the roles of husband and wife, and in the third, young people find fulfilment more in developing their personality and career than in developing their family. This last change overlaps with the 1960s, with many revolutions in different parts of the world, revolutions that brought about major changes in the socio-economic dynamics, and changes in political regimes (over 32 states gain their independence), with the liberalization of women with the sexual revolution, etc. all with a major impact on changes in the world so implicitly also regarding the institution of marriage.

If a few decades ago the institution of marriage was considered essential for structuring adult life, today various new forms of relationships offer couples alternatives for experiencing sexual and emotional intimacy outside of marriage (Treas, Lui & Gubernskaya, 2014). With these changes came differences in what people valued in life and relationships, and in whether they chose to start a family. These to the system currently to different forms of marriage but also to the excessive valorisation of celibacy or even the development of niche areas regarding. These notions such as for example those who are part of the „incel” category (involuntary celibate) (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>). A major change comes with liberalization, namely cohabitation before marriage, which leads to a first „fluidization” of this institution (Thornton, Axinn & Xie, 2010). Changes in marriage have also led to changes in attitudes towards marriage, and thus the shift has been made from finding fulfilment in marriage to not. Necessarily having to be married to be fulfilled in your life. It also seen from this association that the transition from being together in marriage to being not necessarily together and even o rather alone has been achieved. All of this being centred on individualism, on personal good, on the valorisation of independence. (Kawamura, 2011; Yoon, Lim & Kim, 2022; Lee, Brzozowska. & Sobotka, 2024). Some of the influences of these changes have also led to changes in other areas, not just to socio-human ones. An example in this sense is given by the change of law in terms of support and providing support in adult relationships in terms of families, a change that took place in Canada and was brought about by a report called “Beyond Conjuality” which sought to clarify the terms of marriage (changed over time due to many changes and imprecise definitions in the law) (Polikoff, 2003). Returning to the changes in the socio-human field, we find that with the fluidization oof marriage and a decrease in the birth rate. A possible explanation for this is the age of marriage, which has changed from young to increasingly older ages, from marriages performed very early at 14, 15 years old in the past to marriages performed after 30 years old today (Abdurahman, Assefa & Berhane, 2022).

1. Family of origin and the socialization process

Attitudes, intentions to marry, and desires to have children are deeply anchored in socialization within the family of origin, with childhood experiences providing the foundation for marital beliefs and expectations (Ganong et al., 1981). Interaction patterns are directly influenced by or through parental observation, although the dynamics of the formation of the merit view are complex, being also influenced by education, gender roles, media, and one's own romantic relationships (Babarskiene & Gajduk, 2018).

Through socialization, individuals internalize the group's culture, the mechanism ensuring both human development and social continuity (Gecas, 2001; Putney & Bengston, 2002). If behavioural psychology associate socialization with learning patterns through modelling and reinforcement from the sociological environment, they define it as an internalization of roles and statutes (Gecas, 2001). Thus, values and mentalities transmitted generationally ensure the alignment of individual behavior with community norms (Sandu, 2014).

As the main agent, the family facilitates the child's social integration by transmitting skills and roles. However, socialization is continuous throughout life and joining new groups imposes socialization (Putney & Bengston, 2022; Sandu, 2014).

Primary socialization and its dimensions

Primary socialization carried out in childhood within the family is crucial for physical and emotional development, having a strong affective and cognitive charge (Crisogen, 2016). At this stage, communicative experience develops — from nonverbal to articulated language —, parental messages reflecting the social environment of origin. Moral socialization is still occurring (through the system of rewards and punishments that define approved) and gender socialization (Sandu, 2014).

Gender socialization begins early, with children becoming aware of their gender identity around the age of 3 (Stockard, 2006). In this context, the distinction between sex (anatomical and reproductive characteristics) and gender (a social construct expressed along a continuum of masculinity and femininity) is essential (Kretchmar, 2011). This process is guided by gender norms that regulate what is considered appropriate behaviour and by gender stereotypes, understood as binary, preconceived beliefs that reinforce these norms (John et al., 2017).

Secondary socialization and experiential learning

Secondary socialization begins in preadolescence and continues into adulthood, marking the individual's interaction with media external to the family such as educational and professional institutions. Characterized by emotional neutrality, this allows the internalization of norms specific to our acquired statues and roles (Crisogen, 2016; Sandu, 2014).

In addition to socialization, your mother's beliefs are shaped experientially through previous relationships (Frazier & Esterly, 1990). The experiential learning. Theory proposed by David Kilb (1984) under the influence of Dewey, Lewi and Piaget, approaches the holistic process, highlighting the interaction between cognition, environment and emotions. Kolb describes a cycle consisting of two modes of understanding (abstract conceptualization and concrete experience) and two modes of transforming experience (active experimentation and reflective observation), where concrete experience underpins reflection and new concepts.

Experiential learning starts from the ability to derive from the efficient processing of concrete experiences, aiming to optimize interpersonal communication and decision-making skills (Sanders & Yanouzas, 1985). For example, premarital courses based on this model provide young people with a deep understanding of couple dynamics, preparing them to choose compatible partners and effectively manage relationship challenges (Nielsen et al., 2004).

2. Social phenomena that influence the perception of marriage

Narcissistic and individualistic tendencies in relationships

Interpersonal relationships are deeply influenced by cultural norms (individualistic or collectivist) to which individuals are exposed, modernizing their self-perception as independent or interdependent (Lin et al., 2017). Individualism promotes a vision of the self-separate from others, accepting autonomy, the uniqueness of individual rights, and personal fulfillment (Grossmann & Santos, 2020; Lin et al., 2017). In an individualistic culture, relationships tend to be maintained with foresight when the benefits outweigh the costs (Humphrey & Bliuc, 2021). Although it offers freedom of action and mobility, excessive social centrality can negatively affect interpersonal connections (Ogihara & Uchida, 2014). In the Romanian space, research indicates that it is intermediate but closer to the individualist one (Chelcea et al., 2000).

This cultural orientation. Has favoured the emergence of a “narcissistic epidemic” in Western societies (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Narcissism involves an unrealistically positive self-image, egocentrism, and a sense of entitlement (Campbell & Foster, 2011). In romantic terms, narcissistic people have difficulty connecting deeply, viewing partners as tools to validate their own image and being attracted to high social status. Their relationships are often superficial, marked by playful love oxide, low commitment, fidelity, and high divorce rates (Altınok & Kılıç, 2020).

Gender equality requirements

Gender is a cross-cutting and dynamic sociocultural variable that determines the expectations, roles, rights and responsibilities attributed to men and women in each context (Gianesini, 2014). Gender equality is a socio-political ideal that seeks to guarantee equal opportunities and balanced partnership in the family and society without biological sex dictating and individual's path (UNICEF, 2017). In recent decades, the massive insertion of women into the labour market has declined the traditional model of the man as the sole financial supporter but has generated role conflicts for women who continue to manage most domestic tasks. Attitudes towards gender roles vary from traditional (which prioritizes the domestic role of women) to equalize (who support equal involvement in work and family), fully influencing nuptiality (Hu et al., 2021). On the one hand, traditional specialization of tasks has historically been associated with greater marital stability. On the other hand, modern views change the dynamics of couple formation: egalitarian women are less willing to leave their parental home just to get married and want fewer children, while egalitarian men are more likely to want marriage and children and have a lower risk of divorce. At the same time, your orientations increase the likelihood of cohabitation (Kaufman, 2000).

Although some studies show that equal decision-making and men's involvement in household chores increase the quality of marriage (Amato et al., 2003), to research nuances this aspect by suggesting that marital happiness depends strictly on the woman's perception

of the fairness of the division of tasks; women tend to be more critical in this aspect, reporting lower levels of satisfaction (Oláh & Gähler, 2014).

Very romantic and unrealistic ideals about marriage

Romantic ideals can manifest as unique, highly personalized perceptions of the ideal partner (Markey & Markey, 2007), or as a collective set of idealized credits about the absolute power of love (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). This second model is structured around four fundamental themes: love ignores flaws, there is a perfect partner, love appears instantly and can overcome any obstacle (Sprecher & Metts, 1999).

According to media cultivation theory, schools and churches reinforce these ideal images (passion, perfect communication, love at first sight), often creating unrealistic expectations compared to the reality of marriage (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Segrin & Nabi, 2002). While some research claims that maintaining these ideals has a positive and protective impact on relationships (Montgomery, 2005; Sprecher & Metts, 1989, 1999), sometimes suggests that unrealistic standards become rigid and harmful in the long run (Fletcher et al., 1999).

Increased tolerance towards cohabitation and sexual experiences outside of marriage

Although marriage remains an important institution, its meaning has been profoundly redefined with the social acceptance of premarital sex, cohabitation, and the birth of children outside the legal framework (Trask & Koivunen, 2007). The evolution of cohabitation has gone through three stages: loudspeaker (probation period before marriage), permanence (normative alternative to marriage) and family arrangement (assuming the functions of procreation and raising children without a legal act) (Kasearu & Kutsar, 2011).

Most adults yearn for cohabitation to prove compatibility, achieve intimacy without formal obligations, or avoid the risk of divorce (Larson, 2001). However, over marital cohabitation is statistically correlated with. An increased risk of subsequent dissolution of the marriage. People who choose cohabitation often exhibit a lower commitment to the institution of marriage, a greater tolerance for divorce, and a pronounced emphasis on individualism (Teachman, 2003). Sexual permissiveness is closely linked to marital projections: career-focused men tend to be more sexually permissive, unlike those who prioritize marriage (Carroll et al., 2007; Carroll et al., 2009). Frequent sexual activity leads young people to consider cohabitation as a criterion for eligibility for marriage (Edin et al., 2003), while people with strongly pro-marriage attitudes reject the idea of cohabitation in the absence of concrete wedding plans (Willoughby & Carroll, 2012).

Legal reflection of the transformations in the institution of marriage

The changes in perception brought about by individualization and the demands of gender equality find a direct reflection in the evolution of the legislative framework of family law. The transition from the patriarchal to the egalitarian model was legally enshrined in national legislation through the Civil Code, which establishes full equality of rights for spouses, patrimonial independence through the possibility of choosing the regime of separation of property (matrimonial convention) and complete freedom in choosing one's profession or place of residence (Codul Civil, Art. 308-312; Almășan, 2013). This legislative openness towards autonomy meets the adventurist tendencies in contemporary society, but it also generates tension between legally protected individualism and the obligation of solidarity, moral support

and contribution to the expenses of marriage imposed by the norm (Reghini, Diaconescu & Vasilescu, 2013).

On the other hand, although increased social tolerance towards cohabitation has transformed cohabitation into a normative reality (Kasearu & Kutsar, 2011), The Romanian legal system maintains a rigid distinction, refusing to assimilate consensual union with legal marriage and depriving cohabitants of the specific protection of inheritance rights. Or community of property (Avram, 2016). This asymmetry between psychosocial reality and the rigidity of the legal norm demonstrates that, while highly romantic or unrealistic ideals tend to ignore legal formalism, ignorance of the law in the premarital phase exposes individuals to major vulnerabilities in the event of the dissolution of the relationship (Florian, 2011).

2. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

Attitudes and expectations about relationships are important factors in personal relationships. Beliefs and myths related to marriage, deeply rooted in the social and individual psyche, can affect beliefs about relationships and subsequent behaviours, such as marriage decisions and patterns of behaviour within the relationship.

2.1. OBJECTIVE

O1: Assessment of attitudes, expectations and dysfunctional beliefs regarding marriage among unmarried students, correlated with analysis of marital status and their parents' relationship (through semi-structured interview).

O2: Analysis of the impact of socio-demographic factors (sexual, environment, ideal age) and the parental model (status, relationships) on students 'vision of marriage and couple relationships.

O3: Implementing and evaluating a long-term intervention on the legal aspects of marriage and its influence on young people's beliefs.

2.2. HYPOTHESES

I1: It is assumed that young people's opinion on the ideal age for marriage influences marital attitudes represented by marriage intention, expectations from marriage, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships and the romantic implications of relationships.

I2: It is assumed that there are significant differences based on young people's gender and background in terms of marital attitudes represented by marriage intention, expectations from marriage, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, and romantic implications of relationships.

I3: Youth participation in the intervention program on legal aspects of the family leads to a significant reduction in dysfunctional beliefs and myths about marriage.

3. METHOD

3.1. SAMPLE AND DESIGN

The participants in the study were selected from multiple universities in the western part of our country, aged between 20 and 32 years ($m = 22.46$). Participants voluntarily chose to participate following an advertisement for study enrolment. They were informed about the research, stages, utility and confidentiality of the data obtained. The categories of participants were students with unmarried marital status at the undergraduate level, in various specializations 24 people (39,3%) in psychology 21 people (34,4%) in social work, 9 people (14,8%) in educational sciences and in the engineering field there are 3 people (4,9%). The total number of subjects participating in the study is 57. Initially, 65 individuals expressed interest in participating in the study; however, over the course of the research, some withdrew for personal reasons. From the perspective of the subjects' gender, these are 50 women and 7 men. Also, the subjects are from both urban and rural areas, namely 34 from urban areas and 23 from rural areas. All participants were informed that the survey information was completely confidential and that they would only be identified by their subject number to maintain anonymity. The evaluation was done online, via email and electronic messaging applications.

Research design: a mixed-methods study (quantitative-qualitative), incorporating a quasi-experimental, comparative, and correlational approach, with a pre-test/post-test legal-educational intervention design.

3.2. INSTRUMENTS USED IN THE STUDY

Data about the sample were collected through a questionnaire consisting of: a form with socio-demographic data (which captured the basic characteristics of each respondent: age, gender, marital status, the environment of origin, level of education, the study program followed and the marital status of the parents), A semi-structured interview through which we investigated the quality of the respondents' parental relationship and their opinion regarding the perceived ideal age for marriage. In addition to these, the following evidence was involved:

The IMS Marriage Intention Scale and the AMS Marriage Expectations Scale (Park & Rosen, 2013). These chairs are two of the three steps that make up the Marital Scales, tool developed by Park & Rosen, that it began to be applied to a sample of the population, which includes people of any age, ethnicity, gender or marital status. Responses to items refer to the degree of agreement or disagreement on a 7-point Liker scale, where 0 represents total disagreement and 6 represents total agreement. The marriage intention scale consists of 3 items, one of which is inverted, and measures a person. intentions to marry in the future. The sum of the scores is between 0 and 18. Higher scores indicate a person's more positive intention to marry. The Marriage Intention Scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a coefficient Alpha Cronbach $\alpha = 0.91$, and Construct validity. The Marriage Expectations Scale consists of 23 items, 4 of which are reversed and measure a person's expectations regarding certain aspects of marriage. The sum of the scores is between 0 and 138. Higher scores indicate more positive expectations for the importance of six factors or categories given in marriage

and relationships: romance, respect, trust, finances, meaning, and physical intimacy. (Park & Rosen, 2013). The Marriage Expectations Scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of $\alpha = 0.92$, and Construct validity.

Mas Marital Attitudes Scale (Braaten & Rosén, 1998) measures both the attitudes and opinions of married and unmarried people towards marriage. It comprises 23 statements to which respondents are asked to rate their degree of agreement or disagreement on a four-point Likert scale, where 0 represents total agreement and 3 represents total disagreement. The total score is obtained by summing all. Individual item scores, nine of which are reversed. Total score can range from 23 to 92, with higher scores indicting more positive attitudes toward marriage. Braaten & Rosén (1998) reported high internal consistency of the MAS, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of $\alpha = 0.82$, and high Construct validity.

RBI Relationship Belief Inventory (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982), describes dysfunctional beliefs and includes statements that represent the ways an individual might feel about their relationship with someone else. The statements characterize the following five irrational beliefs: (a) Disagreement is destructive (for example, the disagreement is destructive to a relationship), (b) mind reading is expected (for example, partners should be able to read each other's thoughts), (c) partners cannot be changed (for example, partners are unable to change themselves and their relationships), (d) sexual perfectionism (for example, we should expect sexual perfection from ourselves and/or our partner), and (e) genders are different (for example, men and women have different needs in relationships). The Relationship Beliefs Inventory consists of 40 items, 15 of which are reversed. Respondents are asked to rate on a six-point Likert scale the extent to which they believe each statement is true or false, where 0 means "I strongly believe that the statement is false" and 5 means "I strongly believe that the statement is true." The total score ranges from 0 to 200, with higher scores indicating a greater degree of endorsement of the dysfunctional beliefs. For each subscale, the total score can range from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating a greater degree of endorsement of the dysfunctional beliefs represented by the respective subscale. (Bradbury & Fincham, 1993). The results obtained by Eidelson and Epstein (1982) indicated internal consistency, convergent validity and construct validity for the subscales used in the instrument. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient calculated for each subscale ranged between .72 and .81, establishing internal consistency. By summing the scores obtained on items 10, 15, 35, 40 we calculated another dimension which we called "difficulties in understanding the opposite sex".

The Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS) (Sprecher & Metts, 1989) was developed to measure beliefs identified in the literature as specific to the ideology of romanticism. The 15 items assess the following four beliefs: (a) love finds a way (no obstacle is too strong to stand in the way of love); (b) the one and only (there is only one soul mate); (c) idealization; and (d) love at first sight. Respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree". The total score is obtained by summing the individual item scores. The first item is reverse-scored, and higher scores indicate a higher degree of romanticism. The internal consistency of the RBS is generally good, and reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .81 for the entire scale, with a range of .57 to .80 for the subscales. Although the Relationship Belief Inventory and the Romantic Belief Scale assess beliefs about romantic relationships in

general, not specifically beliefs about the marital relationship, I chose to use these instruments because they have been used in the literature before (Sharp & Ganong, 2000) for assessing unmarried young people's beliefs about the marital relationship.

For the third hypothesis, a long-term intervention was implemented, covering topics that integrate elements of law and psychology, with the following content:

Module I: Introduction and demystification of marriage as a legal act

- Meeting 1: Beyond romance – what is marriage, legally? Content: discussion about the difference between the social/emotional contract and the legal contract. What is the Civil Code and how does it regulate love?

- Meeting 2: Engagement and promise of marriage. Content: legal aspects regarding engagement in Romania (legal effects, breaking the engagement and returning gifts). Myths related to the "obligation" to get married.

Module II: Matrimonial regimes (money and property in the couple)

- Meeting 3: The Legal Community – What's Mine Is Yours? Content: the regime of common property versus private property. Debunking myths related to the division of property. Psychological aspects involved in what each party considers a partner regarding money, value, inheritance, loyalty.

- Meeting 4: Prenuptial agreement (separation of property and conventional community of property). Content: what a matrimonial convention really means in Romania. Addressing psychological barriers: why the prenuptial agreement is seen as a "lack of trust" and how it can become an instrument of emotional security.

Module III: Rights, obligations and myths in everyday life

- Meeting 5: Personal rights and duties of spouses. Content: full independence of spouses (choice of profession, residence). Myths related to partner control (the "right" to decide on behalf of the other) vs. the legal obligation of moral support and fidelity.

- Meeting 6: Managing wedding expenses. Content: the legal obligation to contribute to household expenses according to one's means. How unrealistic expectations about money turn into major conflicts.

Module IV: Crisis situations and legal protection

- Meeting 7: Family housing and protection in case of vulnerability. Content: the legal regime of the family home (even if it belongs to only one spouse). Introduction to the legislation on domestic violence and the protection order (the right to safety in the marital space).

- Meeting 8: Divorce myths and legal reality. Content: types of divorce (notarial, court, agreement). Dispelling myths such as "I'll take everything with you in the divorce" or "if I leave home, I lose all my rights" (leaving home vs. de facto separation).

Module V: Responsibility and conclusions

- Meeting 9: Parental authority and the best interests of the child. Content: what "joint custody" means in current legislation, how the parental model in the family of origin (divorce of the subjects' parents) influences their legislative and emotional expectations.

- Meeting 10: Final evaluation and cognitive restructuring. Content: Debriefing session: how young people's dysfunctional beliefs changed after understanding the legal reality behind the institution of marriage.

4. RESULTS

Statistical analysis was performed with SPSS (IBM) 20.0.

The results of the first hypothesis

The first hypothesis assumes - that young people's opinion regarding the ideal age for marriage influences marital attitudes represented by marriage intention, marriage expectations, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships and romantic implications of relationships. Descriptive analysis of the data reveals the following:

Table 1. Descriptive results

Variable / Indicator	N (Valid)	N (Missing)	Media	Standard deviation
Marriage Intention	57	0	11.16	1.976
Total Expectations	57	0	109.85	7.953
Romantic Expectations	57	0	11.60	1.846
Respect	57	0	29.16	1.890
Trust	57	0	24.04	2.003
Financial Expectations	57	0	12.27	2.317
Personal Fulfilment	57	0	20.67	3.370
Physical intimacy	57	0	12.08	2.215
Disagreement is destructive	57	0	13.70	7.539
Difficulty understanding the opposite sex	57	0	9.68	4.368
Mind reading expected	57	0	10.00	3.623
Sexual perfectionism	57	0	11.52	6.466
The sexes have different needs	57	0	7.04	3.818
Partners cannot change	57	0	6.08	4.220
Love finds a way	57	0	32.63	6.718
One love	57	0	11.59	4.940
Idealization	57	0	13.80	4.257

For the first hypothesis, we have a quasi-experimental, unifactorial, between-subjects design, the independent variable is the ideal age for marriage, with two modalities: a) 20–25 years and b) 26–32 years. The dependent variables are intention to marry, expectations from marriage (romantic, respect, trust, financial, personal fulfilment, physical intimacy), dysfunctional beliefs about relationships (disagreement is destructive, difficulty understanding the opposite sex, expected mind reading, sexual perfectionism, sexes have different needs, partners cannot change) and romantic implications of relationships (love finds a way, one love, idealization, love at first sight). The number of subjects aged 20–25 years was 28 and those aged 25–32 years was 29. The subjects' opinions on the ideal age for marriage were heterogeneous, ranging from 20 to 32 years old (24.88). The most common option was 25 years old (36.1%), followed by 27 and 30 years old (14.8% each), while 4.9% of respondents considered that there was no ideal age. From the descriptive data conducted separately by

groups (20-25 years and 25-32 years), it is observed that group 1, which considers the ideal age for marriage to be up to 25 years, has lower marriage intentions, higher general expectations from marriage (romantic, respect, trust, financial, personal fulfilment and physical intimacy) but has lower dysfunctional beliefs (disagreement is destructive, difficulties in understanding the opposite sex, expected mind reading, sexual perfectionism), except for the beliefs that the sexes have different needs and that partners cannot change. Group 2, on the other hand, considers the ideal age for marriage to be from 25 years and up. However, the group that considers the ideal age for marriage to be up to 25 years old are more romantic compared to the second group, thus, they believe that love finds its way, that there is only one love, that love is ideal and they believe in love at first sight rather than the group that considers the ideal age for marriage to be from 25 years old.

The results of the inferential t-test for independent samples reveal significant differences in means between the two groups formed according to the opinion regarding the ideal age for marriage as follows: for global expectations from marriage we have a coefficient value of $t = 3.405$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.001$; for expectations of respect we have a coefficient value of $t = 2.112$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.039$; for trust we have a coefficient value of $t = 2.739$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.008$; for personal fulfilment we have a coefficient value of $t = 3.182$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.002$; for belief in sexual perfectionism we have a coefficient value of $t = -2.741$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.008$; for the belief that partners cannot change we have a coefficient value of $t = -2.707$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.009$; and for the belief that love finds a way we have a coefficient value of $t = 1.987$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.048$.

The conclusions that emerge from the analysis of the hypothesis are in terms of attitudes about marriage, young people who consider that the ideal age for marriage is younger, up to 25 years old, also have higher global expectations from marriage, of respect, trust and personal fulfilment, than young people who consider that the ideal age for marriage is higher, over 25 years old. Moreover, they also have stronger romantic beliefs about relationships, especially the belief that love finds its way to them. On the other hand, young people who consider that the ideal age for marriage is over 25 years old, have more pronounced dysfunctional beliefs, especially regarding sexual perfectionism in the partner and the belief that partners cannot change.

Thus, the first hypothesis of the research is partially confirmed, young people's opinion on the ideal age for marriage influences marital attitudes represented by expectations from marriage, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, and the romantic implications of relationships.

Second hypothesis results

The second hypothesis assumes - there are significant differences based on young people's gender and background in terms of marital attitudes represented by marriage intention, expectations from marriage, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, and the romantic implications of relationships.

For the second hypothesis, we have a quasi-experimental, unifactorial, intersubject design, the independent variable is the gender of the young people, with two modalities: a)

male and b) female and separate c) urban, d) rural. The dependent variables are the intention to marry, the expectations from marriage (romantic, respect, trust, financial, personal fulfilment, physical intimacy), dysfunctional beliefs about relationships (disagreement is destructive, difficulties understanding the opposite sex, mind reading expected, sexual perfectionism, the sexes have different needs, partners cannot change) and the romantic implications of relationships (love finds a way, one love, idealization, love at first sight). From the data obtained, conducted separately by groups, it is observed that women ($m=11.91$) have a higher intention to marry than men ($m=10.92$), also, the global expectations from marriage are higher in women ($m=110.46$) than in men ($m=107.09$) as well as in terms of romantic expectations, respect, trust, financial expectations and personal fulfilment. In contrast, men have higher expectations of physical intimacy ($m=12.45$) than women ($m=12$). Regarding dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, men have stronger beliefs than women regarding disagreement in relationships, difficulties in understanding the opposite sex, the expectation of mind reading, sexual perfectionism and the belief that partners cannot change. In contrast, in women, the belief that partners have different needs in the relationship is more strongly represented. Regarding romantic beliefs in relationships, men seem to believe in romance more strongly than women, with the means for all romantic beliefs being higher for men. The results of the inferential t-test for independent samples reveal significant differences in means between the two groups formed by gender as follows: for expectations of respect from marriage we have a coefficient value of $t = -2.141$ at a significant threshold of $p = 0.036$; for belief in sexual perfectionism we have a coefficient value of $t = 1.985$ at a significant threshold of $p = 0.047$; for idealization of the loved one we have a coefficient value of $t = 1.964$ at a significant threshold of $p = 0.053$; and for belief in love at first sight we have a coefficient value of $t = 2.009$ at a significant threshold of $p = 0.049$.

The conclusions that emerge from the analysis of the hypothesis regarding gender differences are in terms of attitudes about marriage, women have higher expectations of respect than men, on the other hand, men have a stronger belief in sexual perfectionism. Men also have higher romantic beliefs than women, especially in terms of idealizing the loved one and believe more strongly in love at first sight. Thus, the second hypothesis of the research is partially confirmed, there are significant differences based on the gender of young people in terms of marital attitudes represented by expectations from marriage, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships and romantic implications of relationships.

From the descriptive data, conducted separately by groups, it is observed that young people from rural areas have a higher intention to marry than young people from urban areas, also, the overall expectations from marriage are higher for young people from rural areas than for young people from urban areas in terms of expectations of respect, trust, financial expectations, personal fulfilment and physical intimacy, with the exception of romantic expectations, which are higher for young people from urban areas. Regarding dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, urban residents have stronger beliefs than young people from rural areas in terms of disagreement in relationships, the expectation of mind reading, sexual perfectionism and the belief that partners cannot change. In contrast, for young people from rural areas, difficulties in understanding the opposite sex and the belief that partners have different needs in the relationship are more strongly represented. Regarding romantic beliefs

about relationships, young people from the countryside believe more strongly that love finds a way into their lives and idealize their loved one more, while young people from the city strongly believe that love happens once in a lifetime and in love at first sight. The results of the inferential t-student test (table 4.7.) for independent samples reveal significant differences in means between the two groups formed according to the background as follows: for expectations of trust in marriage we have a coefficient value of $t = 2.071$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.043$; for the belief that disagreement is destructive we have a coefficient value of $t = -2.073$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.043$; for the belief that partners cannot change we have a coefficient value of $t = -3.006$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.004$; and for belief in one love we have a coefficient value of $t = -2.262$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.027$.

The conclusions that emerge from the analysis of the second hypothesis from the perspective of the differences brought by the subjects' background are: in terms of attitudes about marriage, young people from rural areas have higher expectations of trust than young people from urban areas, in turn, they have a stronger belief in destructive disagreement in relationships and that partners cannot change. Also, young people from the city have a stronger romantic belief in the existence of a single love than young people from the village.

Thus, this part of the second hypothesis of the research is also partially confirmed, there are significant differences based on the background of young people in terms of marital attitudes represented by expectations from marriage, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, and the romantic implications of relationships.

Results of the third hypothesis

The third hypothesis assumes that young people's participation in the intervention program on legal aspects of the family leads to a significant reduction in dysfunctional beliefs and myths about marriage.

For this hypothesis, the marital status of the parents (married, divorced/separated and other situations – cohabitation, widowed) was related to the intentions of marriage and romantic expectations from it. Marital status of the parents – 39 people have married parents, 16 divorced/separated and 2 other situations. After analysing the data, the following aspects are found: the overall level of expectations from marriage is not influenced by the marital status of the parents. As for the intention to marry of the young people, this is also not influenced by their status. Also for this hypothesis, the entire group of subjects was invited to complete a questionnaire that aimed at: their perception of what the law says about the prenuptial agreement, the legal obligations of spouses, divorce, division of property, raising children in the next two terms if they do not know these topics, if they consider them sufficiently addressed in our country (the response options were on a Likert scale from 0 to 5, where 0 was insufficiently known, and 5 was very well known, and for the second response option 0 was insufficiently addressed and 5 was very well addressed). The data obtained reveal the following: a critical level of legal "illiteracy" among the subjects regarding the institution of marriage. On a Likert scale from 0 to 5, the average score regarding the level of knowledge of legal aspects (prenuptial agreement, inheritance obligations, matrimonial regimes and child custody) was below the moderate threshold ($m=2.40$), indicating insufficient familiarity with the current legislative framework. Moreover, the subjects considered that these topics are "insufficiently addressed" at the national level, the average perception being extremely low

($m=1.45$). These major discrepancies between the social importance of marriage and the actual level of information of young people fully justify and make it imperative to implement a long-term intervention.

After the intervention, the questionnaire was reapplied, and the data revealed that the following subjects achieved an increase in the average scores regarding knowledge of legal aspects ($m=4.45$ which suggests good and very good knowledge). Young people have assimilated what marital regimes, legal obligations and joint custody mean, and the perception of these topics has changed. A radical change in perspective has been observed regarding the prenuptial agreement. At the beginning, they were asked about this topic and 75% of young people associated it with "lack of trust" or "a guaranteed divorce". Post-intervention, over 80% of participants rated its usefulness with grades of 4 and 5 on the Likert scale. Correlating legal information with psychological information reduced unrealistic expectations. The discussion was held around the indicators "Expected mind reading" or "Sexual perfectionism" (from the initial tests) and after the intervention these recorded significant decreases in the averages. Also, the legal myth according to which "in a divorce the mother automatically receives everything, and the father loses any right" was also clarified. If initially the students operated with preconceptions and erroneous information taken from the media or from family history (e.g. the idea that leaving the home leads to the loss of all property), post-intervention they demonstrated a clear understanding of the Civil Code. The most important success of the program was the development of a mature attitude: young people no longer see the law as an intruder in their love relationship, but as a source of protection and clarity for the future family." In conclusion, this hypothesis is also partially confirmed.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of descriptive data by groups highlighted differences in young people's attitudes, expectations, and beliefs towards marriage, depending on the age perceived as ideal for marriage, gender, and background. The group that considers the ideal age for marriage to be up to 25 years old has lower marriage intentions, has higher general expectations from marriage (romantic, respect, trust, financial, personal fulfilment and physical intimacy) but has lower dysfunctional beliefs (disagreement is destructive, difficulty understanding the opposite sex, expected mind reading, sexual perfectionism), except for beliefs that the sexes have different needs and that partners cannot change, compared to the group that considers the ideal age for marriage to be from 25 years old and up. However, the group that considers the ideal age for marriage to be up to 25 years old are more romantic compared to the second group, thus, they believe that love finds its way, that there is only one love, that love is ideal and believe in love at first sight rather than the group that considers the ideal age for marriage to be from 25 years old.

The qualitative analysis of participants' perceptions, open-ended responses, and contextual data provides a deeper understanding of the mentalities, influences, and institutional gaps surrounding marriage among university students. The analysis of the perception of the ideal age indicates a strong concentration of options around the age of 25. This convergence shows that, in the mentality of students, the completion of university studies and the first steps

in their career (specific milestones of the age of 25) are closely linked to the preparation for assuming a lifelong commitment. Dividing the sample into the two groups (20-25 years and 25-32 years) allowed the observation that those who want an earlier marriage also tend to have more idealized/romantic beliefs about the couple, while the older age group manifests a somewhat more pragmatic vision.

The study demonstrates that young students enter the emerging adult stage with high and idealized expectations about marriage, but with severe gaps in terms of the legal reality of this institution. In the absence of formal legal education in schools or universities, young people form their marital beliefs either from parental models at home (which are sometimes dysfunctional or marked by conflicting divorces) or from the media. Based on these conclusions, we can make a recommendation for the introduction of optional courses in “Premarital Counselling and Family Law” in the university environment. The data obtained in the study demonstrate that young people need this guidance to move from myths and fears to a mature, legal and emotional assumption of marriage.

Limitations of the study

The main limitation of the study is the small number of respondents, which implicitly leads to the expansion of the study group for subsequent studies. The relatively small number of subjects makes it difficult to generalize the results to a larger population, so the investigation will be continued with a larger number of respondents. Another limitation of the study is the fact that all respondents are students. Students already have a certain level of education and come from a certain cultural background, which means that their perceptions may differ greatly from those of young people of the same age who have directly entered the labour market or who come from deeply marginalized backgrounds. The subject of marriage, divorce, and especially the relationship between parents is a sensitive one. In the questionnaires and especially the interview, some subjects may tend to provide socially desirable answers (e.g. to minimize dysfunctional beliefs or idealize the relationship between parents), hiding their true perceptions in the desire to leave a good impression.

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