

THE PERCEPTION OF THE JIU VALLEY INHABITANTS REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

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ABSTRACT: *The paper analyzes the perceptions of the Jiu Valley inhabitants regarding certain psycho – social aspects of family life as a result of an empirical study that is part of an extensive research on the families in the Jiu Valley. The research developed in this sense was an attempt to decipher and analyze the opinions of the family members on the concept of happy marriage, the important elements of family life, desirable behavior or attitudes, etc.*

KEY WORDS: *marriage; family; psycho-social aspects of family life; family behavior; desirable.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *A; A14.*

The paper is based on an empirical study that is part of an extensive research on the families in the Jiu Valley regarding the perceptions of their members regarding certain psycho – social aspects of happy marriage. The research developed in this sense throughout the years is an attempt to describe and analyze the opinions of family members regarding: the most important aspects of happy marriage, important elements of family life, their position towards certain undesirable behavior and attitudes and towards the parents – children relationship, etc.

The study is based on a research conducted on a number of 500 families in the Jiu Valley, in the following towns: Petroșani, Petrila, Aninoasa, Vulcan, Lupeni and Uricani. The total number of households under investigation is 51,740, and the number of individuals belonging to these households is 145,641¹.

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¹ As most researchers consider the household an analysis unit, this study has in view the structure of the household, not of the family. We consider the household as the total number of persons that share a living.

The research methodology used in this study is complex. Besides the field research that involves the direct, face – to – face sociological inquiry, under the form of the interview and direct inquiry, other methods were also used, such as the documentation and the observation during the interviews, which ensured the recording of the responses and non – verbal reactions of the subjects while they were expressing their opinions and intentions.

The developed analyses led to a series of conclusions regarding the opinions of family members on certain psycho – social aspects of family life, including their agreement with certain statements or ideas, some of them belonging to the category of "myths", such as the idea that school is more useful for boys than for girls.

1. THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF HAPPY MARRIAGE

In order to capture the most important psycho – social aspects of family life and for the sake of suggestive and concrete presentation, we resort to tables and graphic representations:

Table 1. The most important aspects of happy marriage according to gender* (%)

Aspects	Male	Female
Mutual love	22.2	24.3
Own residence	17.5	14.4
Mutual respect and trust	13.3	15.7
Communication between partners	10.8	13.2
Fidelity	11.1	12.3
Adequate income	13.1	9.5
Sexual compatibility	8.4	7.4
Children	2.9	1.9
Time spent with the family	0.7	1.3

*The first choice was taken into consideration

Both for men and women, love is essential for a happy marriage. This condition is followed, at a small distance, by the necessity that the couple should have their own place. A fairly high percentage was displayed by (in order): mutual respect and trust, communication between the partners, fidelity, whereas the other aspects – among which, surprisingly, the existence of children – gathered very few votes. Nowadays, having their own residence is a dream very difficult to fulfill for most young families. The financial crisis of the past few years has made it impossible for young families to live on their own, the only option being to share a living space with several generations, which is harmful for a happy marriage.

In comparison with men, women give more importance to such subjective aspects of family life as love, mutual respect and trust, communication, fidelity and even the existence of children, whereas men connect a successful marriage with private residence, adequate income and sexual compatibility. These options can also be determined by the way in which the subjects perceive the assumption of roles in the family. Thus, the model identified in this sense is a modern one, in which mutual love,

respect and trust, communication and fidelity are of utmost importance, adapted to the conditions of transition – adequate income and especially a private residence also holding an important position.

It is surprising that the existence of children is attributed such low importance for a happy marriage, which can be identified with the fear of not being able to provide the necessary condition for adequate upbringing. Besides the children, sexual compatibility and the time spent with the family – postmodern conditions of a relation, are considered less important for a happy marriage.

2. THE SUBJECTS' AGREEMENT WITH CERTAIN STATEMENTS REGARDING FAMILY LIFE

The importance of the family for the subjects is shown by the fact that more than half of them consider that happiness necessarily involves being married or having a stable relation, and most of them disagree with the statement that family is an obsolete institution. But is it, then, possible that the subjects should perceive a childless marriage as happy?

Table 2. The subjects' agreement with the following statements (%)

Statements	Da	Nu
Marriage is an obsolete institution	13.2	86.8
To be happy, one must necessarily be married or in a stable relation	36.4	63.6
To be happy, a woman must necessarily have children	48.6	51.4
A man must have children in order to feel accomplished	54.6	45.4

Once again, the presence of children in a marriage does not seem to be very important, as only half of the subjects think that women's happiness and men's accomplishment do not depend as much on the existence of children as they do on being married or having a stable relationship. Knowing the families in the Jiu Valley, this is all the more surprising, as many of them have three or more children. These are the same families that face the most problems (poverty, unemployment, etc.) which determine the parents to consider that it is better not to have kids than not to be able to provide them with elementary living conditions.

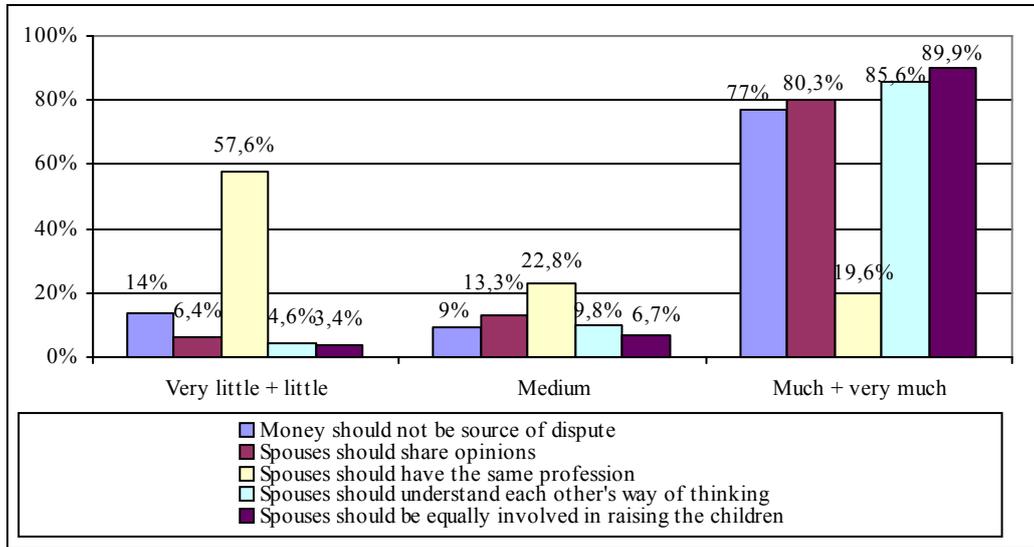


Figure 1. Important elements of family life (1)

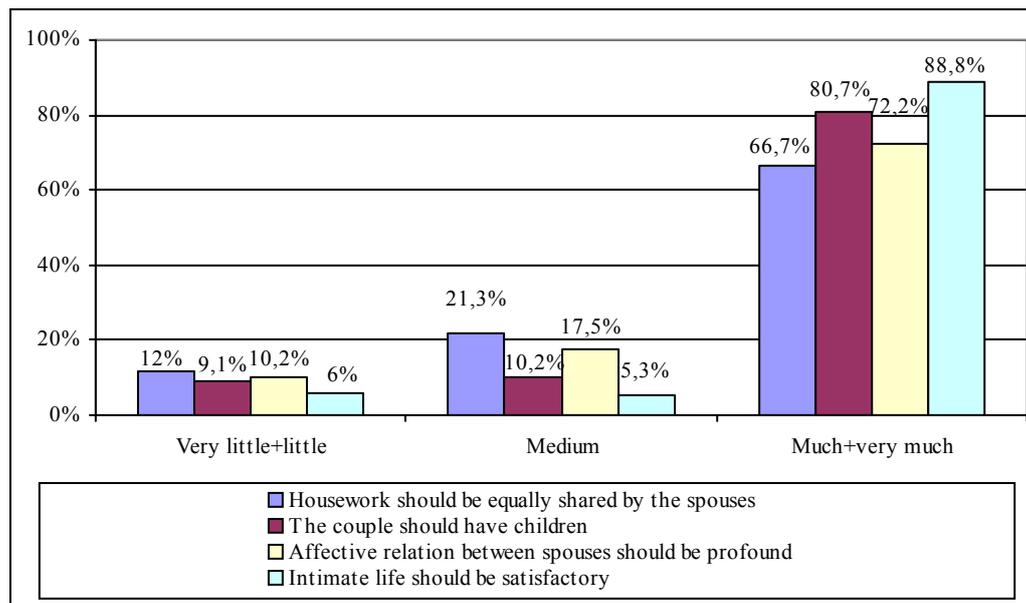


Figure 2. Important elements of family life (2)

The only aspects whose absence seems not to influence the good development of family life is the shared profession of the spouses, the absence of all the other elements having a major negative impact on the family.

The tensions of family life may lead to its dissolution. We have already shown certain elements whose presence or absence can have a negative or a positive impact on family harmony. However, social reality also includes undesirable elements, of

which some, even if not legally sanctioned, leave dramatic traces in the personal history of each family. We are going to identify these elements, alongside with the opinion of the inhabitants about them, expressed by agreement or disagreement:

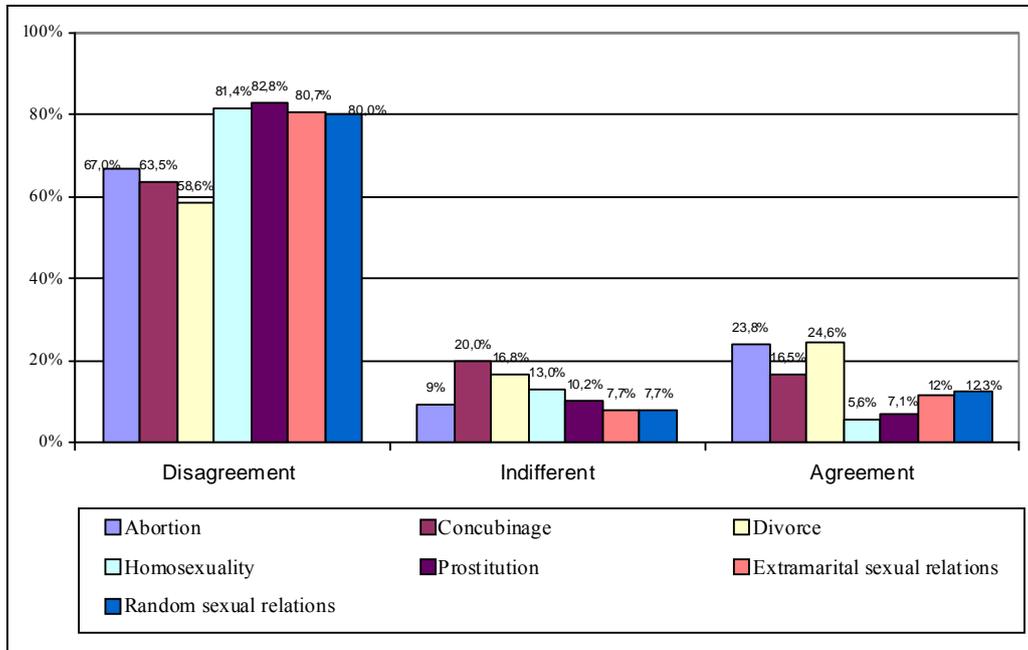


Figure 3. The inhabitants' position towards certain deviating behavior

The only elements of social reality that the inhabitants agree with, in a proportion of almost a quarter, are divorce and abortion. The other aspects are incriminated in proportions of over 50%, prostitution (82.8%) being almost as much incriminated as homosexuality (81.4%). Therefore, we may say that the Jiu Valley community is strongly connected with the values of christian morals.

The traditional labor division within the family is in continuous change on a national level. The separation of roles is still valid, but the situation undergoes a structural change, involving a higher flexibility of the partners. In our case, the situation is as in table 3.

As expected, most of the subjects (with no significant gender differences) consider that the man's duty is to earn money for the household, and the woman's duty is to take care of the house and bring up the children. Thus, the traditional role distribution is predominant in the families in the Jiu Valley. The subjects support traditional roles and perceive the necessity of assuming them for several possible reasons. In the Jiu Valley, the number of jobs is limited and the employment possibilities, especially for women, are extremely limited. As in many families (even in the ones with many children) only the husband works, it is somewhat natural that the man is attributed the task to provide for the family, whereas the woman, who supposedly has more time, is perceived as the one who should look after the household

and the children. On the other hand, the subjects, regardless of their gender, may consider that the woman is more skillful in most household activities, and even in the raising of children. In this context, it is obvious that the change of mentality, the modern (or postmodern) attitude regarding role distribution within the family is not yet very present among the local people.

Table 3. The subjects' agreement regarding the following statements (%)

Statements	Agreement	Neither agreement, nor disagreement	Disagreement	Do not know/ Do not answer
It is more the duty of men than of women to provide for the family	81.4	11.8	6.2	0.6
It is more the duty of women than of men to do the housework and raise children	68.8	16.4	14	0.8
Regardless of the qualities and defects of their parents, children must love and respect them	90.2	5.8	3.6	0.4
The parents' duty is to do what is best for their children, even if this means giving up their own happiness	82.2	12.4	4.4	1

Regarding the parents – children relationship, the great majority of the subjects consider that children must respect and love their parents no matter what qualities and defects they might have, and the parents' duty is to do everything in their power for their children, even if this means giving up their own happiness. This perception of the parents – children relationship can be connected with the situation before 1989, when all the parents were investing almost exclusively in their children, because there was nothing else to invest in, their children becoming the embodiment of their own unfulfilled expectations. Parents, precisely because they are aware that they cannot offer more to their children, consider that their efforts in this sense, even if they involve giving up their own happiness, will somehow make their children love and respect them regardless of their defects.

We have also tried to determine the mentality of the Jiu Valley population, whether people agree or disagree with certain ideas or myths such as, for example, the idea that school helps boys more than girls. We have chosen again to represent graphically the data gathered in the field through the questionnaire and processed with frequency tables:

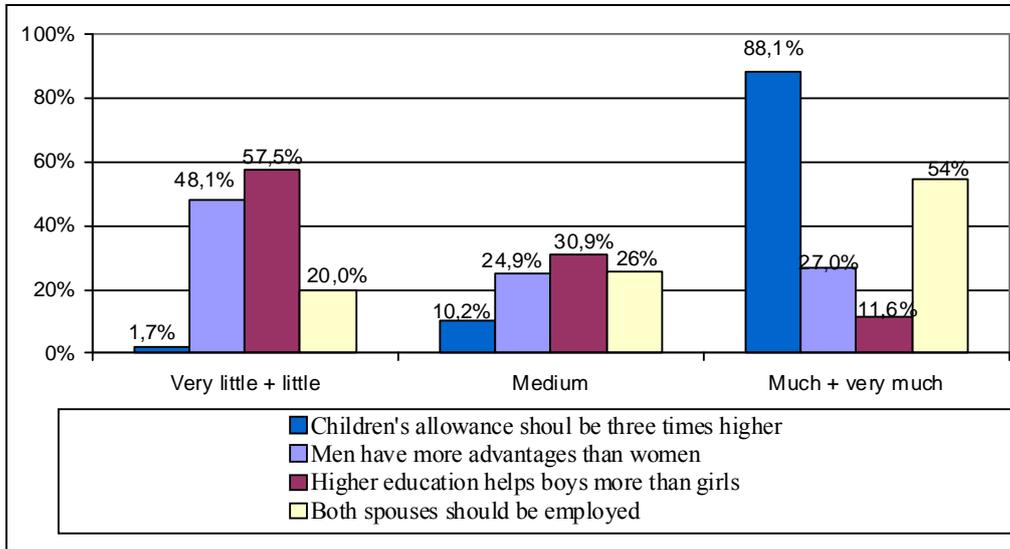


Figure 4. The subjects' agreement with certain ideas (1)

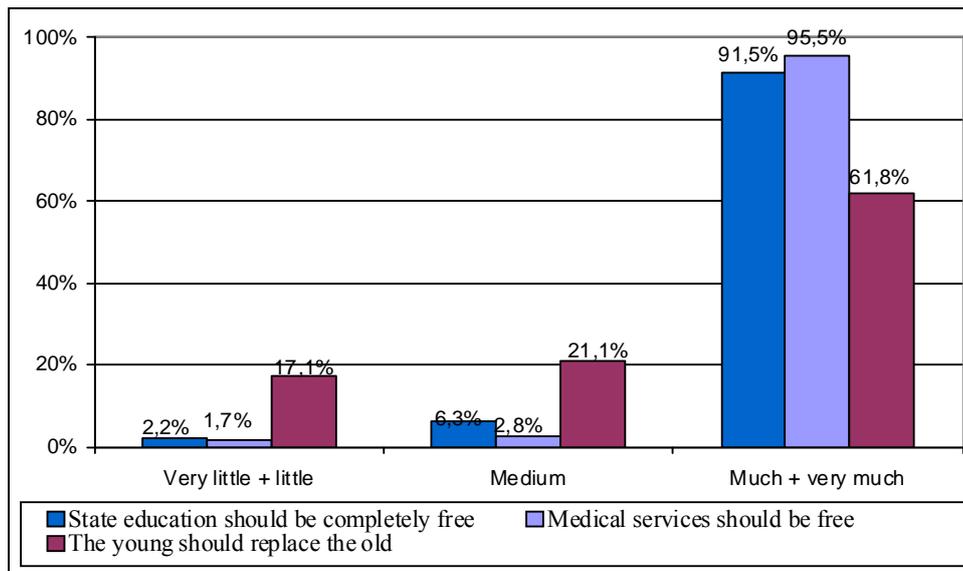


Figure 5. The subjects' agreement with certain ideas (2)

As in the previous case, we rank the agreement, the figures being suggestive as they show the choices in detail: free medical services (95.5%); free state education (91.5%); children allowance three times higher (88.1%); the young should replace the old (61.8%); both spouses should be employed (54%); men have more advantages than women (27%); higher education helps boys more than girls (11.6%).

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