

Snežana S. Stojšin<sup>1</sup>

University of Novi Sad,  
Faculty of Philosophy,  
Department of Sociology  
Novi Sad (Serbia)

Vladan D. Vidicki<sup>2</sup>

University of Novi Sad,  
Faculty of Philosophy,  
Department of Sociology  
Novi Sad (Serbia)

## CHANGES IN THE ATTITUDE OF VILLAGE YOUTH TOWARDS ENTERING MARRIAGE AND STARTING A FAMILY – EXAMPLE OF THE VILLAGE OF KAĆ<sup>3</sup>

---

**ABSTRACT:** The primary aim of this paper is to analyze the changes in attitudes of young people in rural areas towards marriage and the potentials for establishing a family. Potentially limiting material and non-material factors which may influence their decisions to (not) marry and (not) start a family are taken into account. Attitudes towards marriage were interpreted through elements of data from a longitudinal study conducted in 1999 and 2021 in the village of Kać. The data were collected through in-depth interviews. The open-ended questionnaire made it possible to collect wide-ranging data regarding the respondents' perceptions of the necessary conditions for getting married and starting a family, the perceived difference between their experience and that of their parents, of potential problems, of the given opportunities to find a suitable partner, etc. The findings show, among other things,

---

<sup>1</sup> [stojsin.snezana@gmail.com](mailto:stojsin.snezana@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> [vladanvidicki@gmail.com](mailto:vladanvidicki@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> The paper was written as part of the project "Serbian Village between Tradition and Constant Changes", implemented in Matica Srpska and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and Provincial Secretariat for Higher Education and Science.

that in both research periods, more than half of the respondents believe their parents had better conditions for starting a family in comparison to them.

**KEYWORDS:** rural youth, marriage, starting a family, Kać.

---

## INTRODUCTION

By analyzing numerous theories on marital and reproductive behaviour of young people, Pešić Jenačković (2019) indicates a complex combination of factors that influence marital and reproductive behaviour and says that the paradigm resources-limitations-behaviour (Hoffmann Nowotny and Fux) is adequate (Pešić-Jenačković, 2019: 104). Marital and reproductive behaviour has a broad and quite complex deterministic foundation which includes socio-economic, socio-demographic and socio-cultural aspects, so these patterns of behaviour cannot be observed from only one theoretical approach.<sup>4</sup> In this broad deterministic combination, accompanied by long-term effects of modernization, industrialization and urbanization (Marković Krstić, 2021: 231), the decline in the rates of getting married and fertility is also influenced by the changes in the value system, individualism, consumer mentality and a high value of freedom of choice in life (Dovedžić, 2006: 53).

The changes occurring in Serbia in terms of the marital behaviour of the population, i.e., the characteristic of the process of marrying can be tracked through demographic indicators: the number of marriages per 1,000 people (general rate of marriage), average age of the population when entering marriage, average age when entering the first marriage, number of common law unions which have been registered since the 2011 Census etc. (Bobić, 2007). The analysis of the data on the population in Serbia indicates a decrease in the general rate of marrying and the increase in the average age of entering marriage. Therefore, these indicators represent the most frequently mentioned demographic factors in the analysis of changes in the marital behaviour of the population.

In Serbia, “the postponement of marriage or significant shift towards entering marriage at a later age” (Bobić, 2007: 174) is prominent, so the average age of grooms when entering the first marriage increased from 25.5 in 1971 to 31.5 in 2021 and of brides, from the age of 22 to 28.7 (Bobić, 2007: 174; Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2022). At the same time, there has been a decrease in the general marriage rate from 9.3 (in 1971) to 4.8 per mille (in 2021), which means that the rate has halved in these five decades. Bobić (2007: 175) claims that the causes of the nuptial rate are, firstly,

---

<sup>4</sup> Pešić Jenačković groups theories on marital and reproductive behaviour in the following way: the first group of theories comprises “the theory of (first) democratic transition (Landry, Notestein and Thompson), microeconomic theory (Leibenstein, Easterlin, Becker), ideational-cultural theory (Cleland and Wilson) and theory of the second demographic transition” while the second group of theories strives “to explain the combination of several factors and thus revise the listed theories” (Pešić Jenačković, 2019: 104).

the decrease in the number of generations when marriage is most often started (20-30 years of age) and, secondly, changes in the attitude towards the traditional institution of marriage. Therefore, even though the nuptial rate has been significantly affected by the above-mentioned demographic factors, it seems that psychological and socio-economic factors still take great prevalence (Marković Krstić, 2021), while the effect of socio-psychological factors, such as changes in the system of values, beliefs and aspirations which direct the behaviour of the population, is crucial (*Ibid*: 245).

In the period after the Second World War until the last census in 2011, there were significant changes in the marital structure of the population. First of all, the number of married people in Serbia rose until 1961 and then constantly dropped (in 1961, 69.0% people were married and in 2011 that percentage was 55.1%), which indicates that there are changes in the marital behaviour of the population and changes in the attitudes towards marriage. At the same time, there has been a constant rise in the number of divorced people (0.78% in 1948 and 4.93% of the total population older than 15 in 2011) (Marković Krstić, 2021: 233, according to the Statistical Office). In the Census from 2011, in comparison with the observed period, there has been the largest share of unmarried people – 27.9% (Statistical Office, 2013). In addition to the statistical and demographic analysis, research studies are definitely another source of rich sociological material regarding the possible causes and consequences of these changes, including the analysis of socio-economic and psychological factors of marital behaviour.

## METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The paper presents some of the results in relation to entering marriage and starting a family from two larger research studies. The aim of this paper is to indicate changes that have happened in the last two decades and that have been kept track of in the period of 22 years since the first research in 1999 and the second one conducted in the period 2021-2022. In order to be able to compare the data in both research studies, the same questionnaire<sup>5</sup> was used, consisting of open-ended questions. The results presented in this paper are part of a larger research project regarding village youth.<sup>6</sup>

In 1999, the sample comprised 100 young people from Kač between the age of 19 and 27 who were not married. However, in the 2021 research, the upper age limit was moved from 27 to 35 because of “extended youth” which is characterized by longer education, later marriage, later starting the family and, thus, later independence from

---

<sup>5</sup> The questionnaire collected the information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their families, the possibilities to establish a professional career and attitude towards work, the possibilities of employment, marriage and family, free time, and finally the attitude towards the place where they live. An emphasis was placed on the qualitative data analysis. For more on methodological characteristics of this type of research, see Stojšin (2021).

<sup>6</sup> One part of the results was published in Stojšin, S. (2021).

parents.<sup>7</sup> In other words, in the second research, the respondents in the village of Kać were young people between the age of 19 and 35, who were not married.

Both research studies were conducted in the village of Kać, which is one of rare places with the steadily increasing population numbers after the Second World War – in 1948, the number of inhabitants was 4,406 and it rose to the estimated 12,683 in 2021 (Statistical Office, 2014)<sup>8</sup>. This rise in the number of inhabitants is a consequence of a low but positive birth rate and migration of the population. The birth rate played a more important role than migrations in the period from 1961 to 1971, when the total increase by 1,061 people was the result of 554 births and 507 migrations. In the period between 1971 and 1981, migrations affected the change in the number of inhabitants more (+1168) than the birth rate (+682) (Stojšin, 2021). In the period of wars between 1991 and 2002, there was another increase in the number of people who migrated there (+1,460) and the birth rate was much less significant than before (215) (Stojšin, 2021: 1364).

Despite the positive birth rate and migration of young people, there is pronounced aging of the population. Thus, in 1991, there were 22% people between the age of 0 and 14, and 24% were older than 50. According to the last Census from 2011, the share of the population between 0 and 14 years of age decreased to 16.5%, while the share of the population older than 50 years increased to 35.8% (Stojšin, 2021). The changes in the age structure of the population of Kać were caused, among others things, by the changes in the marital structure of the population. Namely, in comparison with the Census from 2002, the share of married people decreased by 3.5% in 2011, while the number of those who were never been married decreased by 3.6%. The number of widows and widowers also increased significantly: in 2002 there were 3.6% of them, while in the next Census in 2011 there were 9.6%. According to the Census of 2011, in Kać, there were 27.8% single people, 58.7% were married, 9.6% people were widowed and 3.7% were divorced (Statistical Office).

## ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

Among the numerous data collected in both research studies in the analysis of the attitudes towards entering marriage and starting a family, we analyzed limiting social conditions and the conditions of the local community which could affect (not) entering marriage and (not) starting a family. Both research studies found that young people rarely thought about entering marriage and starting a family.

---

<sup>7</sup> Bobić and associates also say that young people should be defined as a population between the age of 19 and 35, because the period of dependence on the original family has been extended. Young people are becoming independent later in life (10 years later on average in Denmark, Holland, etc.) and only around the age of 35 do they leave their parents, enter marriage, have children, etc. (Bobić, Vesković Anđelković, Kokotović Kanazir, 2016: 25) (after Stojšin, 2021: 1362).

<sup>8</sup> For more, see Stojšin (2021).

a) Difference in the conditions for entering marriage and starting a family

In the first research (1999), more than half of the respondents (58%) said that their parents, who were mainly members of the post-war generations (from 1947 to 1960), had better opportunities to enter marriage and start a family.

- “There used to be better times. They had jobs in state-owned companies, a regular salary and could take loans to build a house.” (M, 23, employed)
- “My parents had better conditions to start a family than us. They had better opportunities to solve their housing problem, employment and a higher living standard.” (F, 22, student)
- “Of course, my parents had better opportunities. At that time everything was much easier; they both worked in state-owned companies, their income was much better, they could start a family on their salaries without any problem, which meant they did not have to think about how they would feed their family, provide for them, pay for basic things.” (F, 23, employed)

Young women were much less happy with the conditions for starting a family than young men, mainly claiming that their parents had much better opportunities. Therefore, only 24% respondents thought they had better opportunities to start a family because their parents provided them with one floor in the family home, which they themselves could never build – this being the answer characteristic of young men. In other words, male respondents thought they had better conditions than their parents, most likely because these parents provided them with a living space by building an extra floor in the family house, which was mostly characteristic of the majority of inhabitants of Kač who moved there after the Second World War, mainly into German houses, while in the 1970s and 1980s they built their own multi-storey houses. This is something mentioned by the respondents during their interviews in both research studies. The assumption is that precisely the available living space is the reason why 25% respondents (88% young men and 12% young women) said that they would remain living with their parents after getting married. Still, more than half of the respondents (53%) wanted to live separately from their parents, in their own house or flat (as many as 68% young women and 32% young men wanting to live on their own). Besides the fact that a quarter of the respondents (25%) said they would live with their parents, as many as 41% respondents expected financial aid from their parents after they entered marriage.

The situation was somewhat different in 2021. The majority of the respondents (78%) did not expect financial aid from their parents, while 14% thought that their parents could help them. Only 8% respondents believed that it was their parents' duty to help them when they became independent and started their own family. There were no differences in the answers in terms of gender.

However, explaining who had better conditions to enter marriage and start a family – young people or their parents (mainly the members of the generations born between

1965 and 1975), the respondents gave very similar reasons to those in the research 22 years ago. More than half of the respondents (59%) believed that their parents had better conditions whereas 35% said that today's conditions were better than at the time when their parents were young. Six respondents could not assess when these conditions were better.

Looking at the respondents' gender, both male (66% of the total number in the sample) and female respondents (56% of the total number in the sample) believed that their parents had better conditions. Most frequently listed reasons were a safe job and regular income like in the first research, but some of the answers in the second research emphasized the political security of the country. The male respondents explained their claims in the following way:

- "I think my parents had better conditions to start a family because the political situation in the country was better." (25, M, employed, high school)
- "Our parents had better conditions because they had a higher income, a more stable job, they all worked in state-owned companies. They did not worry about the job, whether they would lose it tomorrow and how they would feed their family. The political situation today is, if I may put it this way, rather bad..." (23, M, employed, high school)
- "My parents had better conditions both for living and starting a family, they had safe jobs, regular income... There is no doubt that it was a better life. I am 35 and I still don't have a regular job. I have been doing many different jobs for a few months. How can I start a family, what can I live on?" (35, M, unemployed, college)
- "Our parents had better conditions because they had safe jobs. No one can say that today unless they are members of a political party. I am looking for a job that would provide me at least with something so I can become independent, but every job I got was just for a trial period, then employers said they would see about it, or I worked as a slave for a very small salary. The same happened to my girlfriend, so who is going to support us?" (33, M, currently unemployed, high school)

The female respondents offered similar explanations:

- "My parents had better conditions because they had steady jobs, they did not have to worry about whether they would lose their jobs and finance in general." (28, F, student, does not plan to get married)
- "My parents had better conditions, they had better opportunities to buy their own real estate. We don't have that today." (31, F, employed, faculty)
- "Our parents had better conditions primarily because they had more options to find a job they were educated for. I am 29 and I have done several jobs, the last job I had was a year ago. My parents had safe jobs and better living conditions." (29, F, occasionally employed, high school)

- “My parents had much better conditions because marriage and family at their time were much more stable, they were not too ambitious to be educated and to work on themselves.” (20, F, occasionally employed, high school)
- “Our parents had better conditions because the working hours were shorter, from 7am until 2pm, or from 8am until 3pm. Today working hours do not allow you to do any activities except work.” (33, F, employed, college)

A number of the respondents (35%) responded that they had better conditions than their parents, primarily because of good economic situation that their parents provided for them. Here are a few typical answers:

- “Personally, I think I have better conditions because my parents originally came from poor villages and I am in a better situation. I expect my parents to help me when I get married, but to a small extent.” (23, F, unemployed, high school)
- “I have better conditions because I can choose when and who I will marry, who I will live with, unlike my parents.” (25, F, occasionally employed, high school)
- “I think I have better conditions to start a family because today we have much more commodities than in the period of inflation and sanctions. I do not expect financial help from my parents because I think I should find a job and be financially independent. (21, F, student)
- “I have better conditions to start a family because of the support my parents give me, especially the financial support they did not get from their own parents.” (19, M, student, high school, expects occasional financial help from his parents when he gets married)
- “I have better conditions. Now I am a student, but when I graduate, I will get a job for which I was educated and I will have means for living.” (19, M, student)

One set of questions referred to potential limiting conditions when entering marriage and starting a family, or more precisely, the intention was to find the answer to the question about what worried young people most when they thought about marriage. Although part of these “negative” attitudes towards the conditions that limit the respondents in entering marriage was already seen in the previous answers, in this set of questions new potential problems appeared in addition to financial means and employment.

In the first research, financial means and the economic situation were singled out as the most worrying factor for young people when they thought about marriage, and a typical answer was:

- “I’m mostly worried about money. I don’t know if I will be able to provide for my children the same that my parents provided for me.” (21, F, student)

That is what the respondents spoke about most frequently. Speaking and thinking about marriage was mainly the characteristic of female respondents, because 19% of

young men did not think about entering marriage and starting a family at all, while the share of young women in that respect was much smaller (10%). Thus, we got the following results: 29% of the entire sample did not think about it, 17% answered that they most often thought about love, 6% thought about boredom which would occur in marriage and 7% thought about marriage in general and what it brought along. The most important topic in the first research was that of finance; as many as 41% of the total number of the respondents said they mainly thought about the economic situation. Older respondents thought about marriage and starting a family to a greater extent. In the answers of both employed and unemployed respondents it was evident that money was the most frequent topic when they thought and talked about marriage.

- "The most frequent topic of conversation is how and where to live and from what means. I cannot put myself in a situation to have my children starving and being on the street. My boyfriend works occasionally, but that is nothing significant." (27, F, employed)
- "We talk about the possibilities to support a family and lead a civilized life." (28, M, employed)
- "Of course, we mainly talk about money. It doesn't sound very romantic but the present time call for it. If love is strong, it will lead to marriage, but money is what dictates life." (23, M, unemployed)

Twenty-two years later, young people were again worried about the same things. Namely, the results were so similar that in some questions there were no differences among answers at all. The results have shown that 53% respondents in the more recent research mostly talked about money, which is a somewhat higher percentage than in the previous research.

However, almost one third of the respondents (31%) did not talk about marriage at all and the answers did not differ between genders. Namely, 39% respondents listed several topics or areas concerning marriage that they talked about, stating that they talked about money and becoming independent from their parents, as well as about the characteristics of their future partner. As many as 22% of the total number of respondents said they mostly talked about whether they would choose the right partner while 8% said they talked exclusively about money.

The answers to the question what worried them most when they thought about marriage corresponded to the answers given in the previous question. Thus, 35% respondents, mainly younger people who did not think about entering marriage soon, said that they did not worry about anything yet.

Among the answers to this question, we can emphasize that 25% respondents were mostly worried because of the future partner, i.e., whether they would marry the right person, they thought about possible mistrust, disappointment, divorce, vices that the partner had or might have etc. This concern for the characteristics of the marital



partner were equally present among younger and older respondents. They stated that they worried whether the marriage would be harmonious or if they would quarrel. This is a completely new topic in comparison to the previous research:

- "I keep thinking if I will find the right partner, I think about the vices that the girl could have, about the future in general, but I really worry about vices most." (32, M, employed temporarily, high school)
- "I am very worried if I will find the right person. I often think about the choice of the future partner, if my choice will be adequate." (27, M, employed, high school, thinks about getting married)
- "I most often think about the person I would marry, what she would be like, if we would have a harmonious life, whether she would be the right person or if I would make a mistake. This worries me a lot, whether I will choose the right person. I think it's very difficult today." (19, M, student)
- "I most often talk and think about a harmonious marriage full of love, because I am afraid of getting divorced. I think about what a potential divorce might bring, problems and constant fights with the partner. I don't know if we will get along." (23, F, unemployed, high school)
- "When I think about marriage, I most often think about distrust, I am afraid that I will not be able to trust my partner. On the other hand, I am concerned about the lack of freedom, uncertainty, possible disappointment in my partner and children. I don't know... I worry about it a lot." (25, F, occasionally employed, high school)
- "We most often talk about the plans for the future, our worldviews, our desires and how to accomplish them. I worry very much whether I will marry the right person." (29, F, occasionally employed, high school)
- "We talk about how different marriage now is from what it was like in the past. It is a big problem to find the right person I could start a family with and have a successful marriage. I worry about the choice of the right person, the vices he might have..." (20, F, occasionally employed, high school)

Money was still a big problem for young people and 34% of them mentioned it in their answers singling it out as the only concern or one of the concerns alongside the concern in relation to living conditions in general (children, housing, employment, partner). In the majority of their answers the respondents said that they were worried about several different things, but money was in the core of these problems:

- "We most often talk about whether we will choose the right person as the marital partner and if we will have financial security and housing." (25, F, unemployed, high school)
- "We most often talk about whether we will be able to live away from our parents, about separate housing, about the possibility of having a better job which will allow us to support our family." (29, M, employed, high school)

- “We most often talk about life, money and a way to solve the housing problem and live away from our parents’ home.” (23, M, employed, high school)
- “I most often think about the possibilities of survival, uncertain future, because nothing is certain.” (35, M, unemployed, college, expects financial aid from his parents when he gets married)
- “We most often talk about children, joint real estate, possibility of living together, about the relationship between my partner and me. I am afraid he will be insincere, I have a great fear of not having children, because a marriage without children is not a marriage.” (31, F, employed, faculty)
- “When we talk about marriage, we talk about whether we should get married. I think about my age and then I think that it would be better to get married at an older age. I think the biggest problem is financial means, the place where we will live. I will definitely not live with his mum. I think many issues need to be considered.” (19, F, student)
- “I mainly think about the reasons why I will not get married. People expect me to, but in this kind of situation I definitely don’t want to get married. I am thinking about how to tell everyone who expects me to get married that I don’t want to.” (28, F, student)
- “I am mostly worried whether my husband and I will manage to coordinate our private life and work. I think the most important thing is to provide a decent life and financial stability for my family.” (21, F, student)

Having in mind all these answers, it is somewhat understandable that only 20 respondents (7 female and 13 male) thought about getting married soon, which is only 1/5 of the total number of the respondents. Most young people in Kać today (75%) do not think about entering marriage soon or at all (5%). Taking into consideration the average age of our respondents (28.6), it seems that the number of marriages will continue to drop in the future.

The decision to enter marriage is also influenced by a satisfactory choice of a partner and in Kać young men seemed to be much happier with the possibility of choosing a partner than young women. Namely, 75% of the total male respondents said that they could find a satisfactory partner in Kać, while only 35% of the total number of female respondents thought they had a satisfactory choice of partner in their own village.

In the 1999 research, the majority of the respondents said that they would not like their marital partner to be from Kać (39%) but from a different place, which indicated potential internal migrations. Only 16% said that they wanted to marry someone from their own village, while 45% respondents thought that it was not important at all. However, at that time, just like today, young men from Kać thought that they had a satisfactory choice of partner in Kać, whereas young women were not happy with the

choices. More girls than boys wanted to leave Kać and live elsewhere with their partner who was not from this village.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the results has shown that, in addition to demographic factors, which are primarily characteristic of the population with a regressive type of age structure where the number of people between the age of 20 and 30 is on the decline, the changes in the marital behaviour are primarily affected by socio-economic, as well as psychological factors. Socio-economic factors such as unemployment or an insecure job, lack of money and unresolved housing issues have a negative effect on the independence of young people and their moving away from their parents' home where they are provided such security. On the other hand, the parents who built big family houses in the village try to keep their children, mainly sons, within their households and, due to the above-mentioned circumstances, they actually succeed in this attempt. It is clear that young people cannot "bear the financial burden of leaving the family household and financing their own household" (Marković Krstić, 2021: 245), so younger respondents today mainly expect financial aid from their parents.

In addition to socio-economic factors, which are crucial in both research periods in forming the attitude towards marriage and starting a family, psychological factors in another, more recent research study emerged as very significant. In the research from 1999, these factors could not be singled out from the respondents' answers. Today the respondents assert that they are concerned about vices of potential partners (vices are mentioned in as many as 65 questionnaires in different contexts), possible divorce, not getting along with the partner, which was rarely mentioned in the research 22 years ago. Therefore, social changes that have occurred in our society in the last 20 years and affected the system of values in a negative way, as well as the emergence of different deviant types of behaviour, have also had consequence on the young people's attitudes towards marriage.

## REFERENCES:

- Bobić, M. (2007). *Demography and Sociology – Relation or Synthesis*, Beograd: Službeni glasnik. [In Serbian]
- Bobić, M., Vesković Anđelković, M., Kokotović Kanazir, V. (2016). *Study on External and Internal Migration of Serbia's Citizens, with A Particular Focus on Youth*. Beograd: IOM. Available at: <https://serbia.iom.int/sr/node/129>
- Devedžić, M. (2006). *On natural population movement*. Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike. [In Serbian]

Marković Krstić, S. C. (2021). *Population in the Sociological Context*. Niš: Filozofski fakultet. [In Serbian]

Pešić Jenačković, D. (2019). *Social determinants of marital and reproductive behaviour of the youth in Southeast Serbia*, doctoral dissertation. Niš: Filozofski fakultet. Available at: <https://nardus.mpn.gov.rs/bitstream/handle/123456789/17496/Disertacija.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>. [In Serbian]

Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2014). Comparative review of the number of inhabitants (1948-2011, data by settlements. 2011 Census, book 20. Beograd: Republički zavod za statistiku. [In Serbian]

Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2016). *Marriages and divorces in the Republic of Serbia in 2015*, Press release No. 169 (30 June 2016). Beograd: Republički zavod za statistiku. [In Serbian]

Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2019). *Marriages and divorces in 2018*, Press release No. 178, year LXIX (28 June 2019). Beograd: Republički zavod za statistiku. [In Serbian]

Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2013). *Marital Status*, book 5. Beograd: Republički zavod za statistiku. [In Serbian]

Stojšin, S. (2021). Changes in migratory patterns of village youth: example of the village of Kać, *Sociološki pregled* 56 (4), 1361-1381. DOI: 10.5937/socpreg55-34562

Stojšin, S. (2018). *Population – Sociological Perspective*. Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet. [In Serbian]