STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON FAMILY VALUES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: AT THE CROSSROADS BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Anida Dudić-Sijamija – Sanela Šadić[1]

ABSTRACT: *This study explores changes in family values and orientations among students in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a focus on their perceptions of traditional and modern family models. A qualitative research design was employed, using focus group discussions with 30 university students, to gain insights into their narratives, lived experiences, and attitudes regarding family and marriage as systems of values. The findings reveal that students view the family as a fundamental social institution, yet one marked by tensions between traditional expectations – such as respect for elders, marriage, and family unity – and modern values, including freedom of choice, gender equality, and flexible family roles. Students emphasized love, respect, trust, empathy, and communication as key family values, while also expressing concern about individualism, alienation, domestic violence, and economic instability. Greater acceptance of diverse family forms, such as cohabitation and single-parent families, was observed, whereas attitudes toward same-sex partnerships remained divided. The study highlights the influential roles of parents, religion, education, and media in shaping students' family value orientations. In conclusion, students strive to integrate both traditional and modern values, seeking to preserve family stability while adapting to contemporary social changes. These findings enhance understanding of value transformations among young people and underscore the importance of situating family dynamics within broader societal and cultural shifts.*

KEYWORDS: *students, family values, traditional and modern norms, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

INTRODUCTION

The family is one of the most significant social institutions, originating from basic human needs and deeply rooted in the biological essence of humans. Milić (2007: 19) describes family as "a part of our everyday life that we almost don't notice it. Those who grapple with its pronounced presence or complete absence, feel it far more." In line with this, Čamo (2021: 190) emphasizes: "When we consider family on a colloquial level, we often reduce this primary model of our daily life, in which we participate, create, and are equal members, to a universally accepted necessity, unquestionability, self-understanding, and omnipresence."

Profound changes in social and cultural contexts during the mid-twentieth century led to changes in family structure. The development of different attitudes toward family and family values, resulted in their breakdown. These changes have prompted questions about the status and scope of family values in contemporary society (Khazaie 2016).

The modern family is a product of a long evolution, reflecting changes that have occurred over the last few centuries, which were mostly driven by industrialization, urbanization, and globalization. Describing changes in the family, Giddens observes: "In recent years, societies have experienced changes in family patterns that were unimaginable for previous generations. A wide variety of family models have become a daily feature of our time. People today are much less likely to enter into marriage, and when they decide to do so, it is often in later years; they increasingly cohabit, divorce, and remarry... In short, the family landscape vastly differs from that of 50 years ago." Giddens (1994: 186) The family currently finds itself at a crossroads (Pašalić-Kreso 2004), and for that reason, it has become vulnerable, has difficulty attaining stability, and is becoming temporary. Haralambos and Holborn (2002) stated that the pressure on the modern family exceeds its capacity to withstand, leading to more frequent discussions about its decline and/or disappearance.

Since the early 1990s of the last century, complex transformation processes have made the Bosnian-Herzegovinian family extremely fragile. Life unfolds in conditions of constant uncertainty. The consequences of social events that spill over into individual destinies are simply termed "fluid life" (Bauman 2009: 10), pointing to continuous changeability, instability, and uncertainty. This general uncertainty inevitably affects the family, and today we encounter families with altered structures, relationships, and positions, partners unwilling to enter conventional marriage, single-parent and re-combined families, and other changes. In other words, "the rapid transformation and reshaping inherent to modern society have left no field of human activity untouched" (Sofradžija 2021: 228), including the family.

Transformation of family and family values

Contemporary debates on family often highlight changes in the areas of marriage, communication patterns, power distribution, and family roles. Today's families increasingly face difficulties in establishing clear and stable boundaries that enable functional internal relationships (Giddens 1994; Beck 2011; Milić 2007 Turčilo et al. 2019; Osmić et al. 2024; Dudić-Sijamija 2025). One of the most significant shifts is the gradual move away from the traditional, patriarchal model toward more flexible and contemporary forms of family life.

Before delving deeper into this transformation, it is essential to clarify the concept of values. Kluckhohn (1951) defines values as "conceptions of the desirable" that guide human behavior and serve as a framework for evaluating actions and decisions. Schwartz (1992) further emphasizes that values are trans-situational goals that vary in importance but serve as stable reference points in people's lives. Within the context of a family, values shape norms, expectations, and interpersonal relationships, and they are transmitted across generations.

The traditional family, as described by Bobić (2003), is characterized by hierarchical gender and generational roles, with authority concentrated in the hands of the dominant (usually male) figure and limited space for individual autonomy. These families typically include a larger number of members and emphasize collective identity, cultural preservation, and strong familial cohesion. Patriarchal patterns are not only internal to the family unit but also extend to wider societal structures. In contrast, Milić (2007) identifies the modern family by features such as personal autonomy, emotionally grounded partnerships, the erosion of traditional authority, and increasing gender equality. This transition is especially visible in new marital patterns: lower fertility rates, delayed marriage, cohabitation, and diverse partnership arrangements (Beck – Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Abbott 2014; Šakotić-Kurbalija 2020).

The most obvious signs of family transformation appear in the weakening of family bonds, reduced cohesion, and the rising prevalence of non-traditional family forms (Giddens 1994; Beck 2001; Plopa 2019; Buljubašić–Šadić 2021). The once-dominant nuclear family has undergone a substantial decline as a result of social change, falling fertility rates, the growing norm of having only one child, and the proliferation of alternative lifestyles such as single-parent and reconstituted families (Oatley 2005; Šakotić-Kurbalija 2016; Šadić et al. 2020). These patterns are closely linked to wider societal crises, uncertainties, and identity fragmentation (Fromm 1956; Giddens 1994; Beck 2011).

As family structures shift, so do the values associated with them, often becoming contested or losing their normative strength (Haralambos–Holborn 2002; Milić 2007). Košarac (2019) argues that family values operate on two

levels: (1) as culturally embedded values influenced by broader value systems, and (2) as internal, intimate values developed within families, such as love, solidarity, sacrifice, support, and understanding.

In their research on family identity in the Balkans, Stjepanović-Zaharijevski and Petrović (2014) clearly differentiate between traditional and modern family values. Traditional values are marked by the preservation of customs, emotional warmth within the home, gender-based role divisions, generational authority, child-rearing within the nuclear family, premarital chastity, marital fidelity, social disapproval of extramarital affairs, and resistance to divorce. On the other hand, modern values reflect societal changes and emphasize personal growth, gender equality, equal parenting, parenting as a personal choice, acceptance of cohabitation and premarital relations, and the legitimacy of divorce when relationships become dysfunctional.

These shifts in both family structures and values are deeply connected to broader cultural, economic, and political processes that shape everyday life. However, this transformation is neither linear nor universal; it unfolds unevenly, shaped by local contexts, historical experiences, and generational perspectives. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the transformation of the family is further complicated by post-war realities, chronic economic instability, and fluid identity negotiations (Turčilo et al. 2019; Osmić et al. 2024). Understanding how today's youth relate to these evolving frameworks of family and values is crucial for grasping the direction in which family life and society as a whole are moving. Therefore, contemporary discourse on the family must recognize the coexistence of traditional and modern elements, as well as the tensions and negotiations that inevitably emerge from this complex process of change.

METHOD

Research design

This study employed a qualitative research design aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of students and their perspectives on family and marriage as systems of values. The qualitative approach enabled researchers to explore how participants make sense of ongoing transformations in family values through their own narratives and lived experiences.

Given the exploratory and qualitative nature of this study, the research was guided by the following open-ended questions. First, how do students perceive

and define family and marriage as value systems? Second, in what ways do traditional and modern family values coexist or come into conflict from the perspectives of students? Third, what are students' attitudes toward non-traditional family forms, such as single parenting, cohabitation, and same-sex partnerships or relationships? Finally, how do social and generational changes influence students' family value orientations?

Sample and participant recruitment

The research sample included 30 participants aged between 18 and 30 (M=23, SD=1.02), of whom 20 identified as female and 10 as male. At the time of the study, all participants were university students and not formally employed. Recruitment was conducted through an open call for participation in focus group discussions, which was distributed via university networks and social media platforms.

The decision to focus on students as a key subgroup within the youth population was intentional. University students represent a socially and intellectually engaged segment of young people who are often directly exposed to – and actively reflect upon – cultural, social, and generational transformations. While this limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to all youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it offers a focused and in-depth insight into the family value orientations of a specific group with growing societal relevance. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure diversity within the student population, particularly in relation to gender, age, and family background. This approach aligns with the broader goals of qualitative research, which prioritize the depth of understanding and contextual sensitivity over numerical representativeness. The aim was not to produce statistically generalizable data, but rather to illuminate patterns of meaning and interpretation that young people associate with family and value systems.

Table 1. *Characteristics of participants*

Focus group	Number of participants (N)	Gender	Age range	Education status	Employment status
FG1	10	female (f)	18–20	university students	unemployed
FG2	10	male (m)	21–25	university students	unemployed
FG3	10	mixed	26–30	university students	unemployed

Source: Compiled by the authors.

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected through focus group discussions conducted in controlled settings and moderated by the researchers. Each session lasted approximately one hour. A semi-structured discussion guide was used, covering themes such as definitions and ideals of family and marriage, reasons for (or not wanting) children, perceptions of social and generational change, and views on non-traditional family forms (e.g., single parenting, cohabitation, same-sex partnerships). All discussions were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarization with the data; (2) generation of initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Coding was performed manually and inductively, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data, rather than being based on pre-existing theoretical assumptions. Several iterations of coding were conducted to enhance the credibility and internal consistency of the analytical framework. Participants' quotes are used throughout the results section and are identified by anonymized codes (e.g., FG1: P1 for Participant 1 in Focus group 1), in order to preserve confidentiality.

Table 2. *Main themes and codes*

Theme	Codes/Descriptors
Transformation of the family	Descendants, child-rearing, pre-marital and marital relations
Traditional family values	Preservation of family tradition, gender role division, child upbringing, pre-marital virginity, marital fidelity, stigma surrounding pre-marital and extramarital relations, and disapproval of divorce
Modern family values	Individual development, gender equality, flexible family roles, parenthood as choice, acceptance of cohabitation, divorce, and same-sex partnerships
Transformation of youth value orientations	Societal changes, erosion of shared values, individualism, diversity of family lifestyles, changing gender/sexual roles
The future of family and values	Students' perspectives on marriage, family responsibilities, gender roles, and expectations

Source: Thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2006).

Ethical considerations

The research was conducted in full accordance with ethical standards for social research. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without justification. Written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, including the use of identity nullification techniques and code labeling. Access to raw data was restricted to members of the research team. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Research at the institution with which the authors are affiliated, and the research adhered to the ethical guidelines of the European Union.

RESULTS

The transformation of the family

The qualitative analysis revealed a wide spectrum of students' perspectives regarding the transformation of family roles, structures, and values in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These findings align with prior research on families in transitional societies (Cherlin 2004; Giddens 1992), which underline the simultaneous presence and tension between traditional frameworks and emerging modern models.

The first set of focus group questions aimed to explore how students define the family, its role in contemporary society, and their perceptions of changes in family structures and values. Participants' definitions of family varied considerably between traditional and modern perspectives, with some expressing uncertainty or ambivalence. Their views were primarily influenced by personal beliefs and family environments, with religious values playing a particularly significant role.

Participants described the family ranging from traditional, patriarchal views to emerging modern perspectives, often linking these concepts to religious and cultural heritage. Such claims are supported by findings from Laumann et al. (2005), who emphasize the significant role of religious beliefs and cultural context in shaping family values and practices. One participant stated: *Today's family is more traditional than modern* (FG1: P3), reflecting the persistence of patriarchal norms. Conversely, another noted: *There are modern traits too, like more educated women and better role distribution* (FG2: P7), indicating an awareness of societal change.

Some respondents observed a more significant shift toward modernization, accompanied by growing gender equality and democratization of family relationships. At the same time, they noted an increase in individualism, changes in parent–child relationships, a growing emphasis on careerism (especially among women), shifts in marriage patterns, and a rise in cohabitation and single-parent families.

Students emphasized demographic changes and challenges related to family planning, declining birth rates, delayed parenthood, the prioritization of careers, and the importance of economic stability. Some expressed concern and were highly critical, describing families as violent, with disrupted relationships and poor communication. They also considered geographical context crucial, highlighting the differences between urban and rural settings. One participant described Bosnian-Herzegovinian families as follows:

> *I think the family in BiH is somewhere between traditional and modern. The understanding of family depends on whether young people live in an urban or rural environment... In our society, traditional values are being preserved, but changes like gender equality, freedom in choosing a partner, cohabitation, and premarital sexual relationships are also visible. However, it all depends on the family and its values...* (FG1: P1)

A similar viewpoint was shared by another participant:

> *I currently think that the family in BiH is traditional, but it is changing. I believe that over time, it will completely transform into a modern family, primarily due to the influence of technology, Western countries, and global change. The trend of couples living together before marriage and having pets before children is already present. This is driven by several factors: a strong career focus, increased personal commitments, and a desire to maximize life fulfillment. Some young people view children as a burden in this context.* (FG2: P2)

Regardless of differing perspectives, students expressed no reservations about the importance of family. They emphasized that the family is the foundation of society: a place of belonging, love, and care. They acknowledged its crucial role in shaping individuals, but also recognized powerful external influences on families, including political, economic, and social factors. These factors contribute to feelings of insecurity and a lack of future prospects, which

are among the main reasons young people migrate abroad. These issues have significant implications for family formation and sustainability. Some participants voiced concern about the future of the family.

Despite differing views, participants unanimously recognized the central role of the family as a social institution, aligning with classical sociological perspectives that see the family as the foundation of society (Parsons 1955). They also emphasized macroeconomic and political influences, such as political instability and economic uncertainty, as critical factors affecting family formation and youth migration trends (World Bank 2020).

When discussing social changes over the past thirty years, opinions were divided: some noted an increase in patriarchal tendencies in the post-war period (Inglehart–Norris 2003), while others pointed to the erosion of the importance of the traditional family due to changing values (Beck – Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Positive developments, such as increased parental involvement and awareness of children's rights, were also recognized and align with international trends in family law and child protection (UNICEF 2018).

Regarding the question of whether society's perception of the family has changed over the past three decades, participants expressed differing views. While some agreed that significant changes had occurred, others denied or considered them partial. One participant pointed to post-war re-patriarchalization, while another stated:

> *Due to the influence of other values, the family began to lose importance.*
> (FG3: P5)

Some noted changes in attitudes toward cohabitation and children born out of wedlock, as well as a shift in the average age of marriage. Several participants in FG2 identified positive developments such as:

> *The weakening of patriarchy, greater compromise between partners, more parental involvement in childrearing, and increased recognition of children's rights.* (FG2: P4)

In response to questions regarding how students perceive these changes and whether they view them as positive or negative, several key observations emerged.

Positive changes were primarily related to the position of women within the family, their increased participation in education and employment, and a growing awareness of their rights and freedoms, factors seen as key to achieving equality and balance within the family. One participant noted:

Changes have occurred and are still happening, with both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, there's more space for each family member to develop their identity and interests. But on the negative side, there's a weakening of value systems, like declining respect from children toward parents and the loss of shared family meals. I think this leads to alienation within families. (FG3: P2)

Negative aspects of change include delayed parenthood and fear of parental roles, as well as a perceived increase in domestic violence, with participants noting that such violence is now more visible than in the past. These trends were linked to economic instability, modern societal pressures, and insecure living conditions. One participant stated:

Many young people delay having children because they're not sure they can support a family financially or emotionally. (FG2: P5)

Participants also noted that family violence has become more visible and frequently discussed, although they acknowledged that this might be due to greater media coverage or a real increase in cases. One participant explained:

Family violence is often a taboo topic, but nowadays it's being talked about more – even if that means it's more common. (FG3: P4)

This observation aligns with research indicating a rise in family violence in transitional societies, where socioeconomic crises and structural changes increase family vulnerability. Family violence has serious consequences for the psychological well-being of family members, particularly children, and threatens the stability and functionality of family relationships (Krug et al. 2002).

Moreover, participants pointed to a general weakening of family values, particularly a decline in respect for parents and a reduction in traditional family practices such as shared meals. One participant remarked:

We used to eat together and talk, but now everyone is rushing in their own direction, so the family just isn't what it used to be. (FG3: P2)

The weakening of these traditional family practices can be interpreted in the light of modern social changes, including the accelerated pace of life, technological connectivity that simultaneously leads to social isolation, and

changes in communication patterns (Putnam 2000). These changes often result in reduced quality of family interactions and increased feelings of loneliness.

Finally, participants associated the fear of parenting and uncertainty about the future of the family with Bosnia and Herzegovina's broader socioeconomic and political context. Young people face high unemployment rates, outmigration, and a general sense of hopelessness (World Bank 2020). These circumstances create additional pressure on young people to delay forming families or consider emigration, thereby threatening demographic renewal and social stability (ibid.).

Traditional family values

Qualitative analysis shows that young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina generally express a positive attitude towards traditional family values, which they perceive as the foundation of family life and a key factor of family strength and cohesion. According to Noller and Feeney (2004) values are the basic pillars on which family life is built, and young people recognize the role of love and respect as the most important family values. These values encompass both love among family members and respect for individual boundaries and autonomy. Participants emphasize the importance of positive communication, open dialogue, listening, and mutual understanding, which aligns with Koerner and Fitzpatrick's (2002) findings that quality communication within the family contributes to stability and satisfying relationships. Family roles include caring for others, a sense of security and support, and joint strength that helps face challenges. Empathy stands out as a necessary value without which other values lose their meaning. Some students particularly emphasized the importance of equality among family members and the importance of preserving tradition, customs, and moral norms as the basis for a stable society. One participant summarized this well:

> *Family values are specific behaviors, habits, and customs nurtured within the family, community, and marriage. For me, the most important are: respect for parents and spouses, loyalty between spouses, and shared family activities such as meals, gatherings, and joint parenting. However, it is also important for each member to have space for personal development.* (FG2: P4)

Students emphasize a blend of traditional and modern values, highlighting love as the foundation of marriage, mutual respect, freedom of partner choice,

and general freedom, especially regarding decisions about having children. While some favor individuality and gender equality, others advocate preserving traditional values. Examples of statements include:

> *It is important for children to understand the role of parents; respect is not optional but necessary. Discipline helps create a safe environment for development.* (FG1: P3)

> *Mother and father should equally share responsibility in raising children. Equality at home teaches children justice and respect.* (FG3: P6)

When asked about traditional values present in Bosnian-Herzegovinian society, participants often mention the preservation of family traditions, religious customs, and shared family gatherings during holidays, which strengthen the sense of belonging and togetherness. Raising children according to traditional values is considered especially important. Some participants were critical of premarital sexual relationships and cohabitation, demanding a clearer societal stance and an uncompromising approach to moral norms. Marital fidelity is seen as a crucial foundation for the quality of family relations. They also emphasize preserving family structure, respecting elderly members, and family responsibility:

> *Living together without marriage is not something easily accepted here; most people still hold on to a traditional approach to relationships and marriage.* (FG1: P4)

> *I believe that raising children in the spirit of traditional values is crucial for maintaining family cohesion and respect for elders.* (FG1: P8)

> *There must be a clear boundary in [terms of] moral values, because without it, the family loses its integrity.* (FG3: P4)

Asked which traditional values they would like to see return, young people express a desire for more frequent family gatherings and shared time:

> *We used to have dinner together every evening; now everyone is busy with their phones or obligations. I would like to return to those times.* (FG2: P1)

> *... family means being together, supporting each other live, not just through the internet.* (FG1: P5)

Many insist on stricter parenting, viewing modern parenting as too liberal, lacking discipline and clear rules, and call for the return of parental authority:

> *Children need rules and boundaries. Without discipline, family loses its foundation...* (FG3: P9)

> *...respect for parents and elders must return; this is the only way for families to remain strong...* (FG2: P6)

Concerns were also expressed about the absence of norms in partner relationships, especially fidelity: *Loyalty in marriage is not just a tradition, it's the glue that holds everything together.* (FG1: P4) This desire to return to traditional values stems from the perception that modern society has weakened authority and moral integrity, creating instability in families.

The perspectives of students in Bosnia and Herzegovina on traditional family values reflect a complex approach that combines affirmation of core values like love, respect, communication, and empathy, but also a critical view of modern challenges. They are aware of the need to harmonize preserving key family values with accepting gender equality, individuality, and freedom of choice. Their concerns about weakening authority, moral norms, and family cohesion highlight the need for open dialogue about the future of the family in transitional societies.

Modern family values

When asked "What are modern family values according to your opinion?," the responses revealed diverse perspectives among students regarding what constitutes these modern values. A significant trend in their answers highlights individualization, freedom of choice in family planning and parenthood, and autonomy in decisions related to family life. These decisions, which were traditionally matters of the wider community or extended family, are increasingly regarded as the private prerogative of the nuclear family or married couple. This shift echoes Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) thesis about the "individualization of family life," where family becomes a project defined by personal choices rather than societal prescriptions. Students also emphasize gender equality and the equitable distribution of household and parenting

responsibilities, reflecting global trends documented by scholars such as Coltrane (2000) and Sayer (2010). Flexibility in family roles and structures is underscored as a crucial modern value, including the acceptance of cohabitation before marriage, which is now destigmatized among many youth (Smock 2000). Destigmatization of divorce and acceptance of divorced individuals were also identified as important markers of modernity within family norms (Amato 2000).

However, while some participants expressed a positive attitude towards modern values, others showed reservations, uncertainty, or even disapproval. A notable number of participants expressed strong criticism of same-sex marriages, citing moral concerns and emphasizing traditional conceptions of family structure and marriage. Cohabitation also remains a contested issue, with some opposing it on moral or cultural grounds. This diversity of opinion aligns with the broader social ambivalence documented in studies on family change in transitional societies (Inglehart–Norris 2003; Kalmijn 2011).

Illustrative statements from young participants include:

Modern values mean freedom to choose who and when to marry, and whether to have children at all. It's about respecting each person's life plan. (FG2: P7)

Gender equality is essential. Both partners should share household chores and childcare equally. (FG1: P3)

Living together before marriage should not be taboo anymore; it's how people get to know each other better. (FG3: P10)

On the other hand, some voices expressed concern and disapproval:

Marriage is between a man and a woman; anything else is confusing and against our traditions. (FG2: P5)

I think cohabitation without marriage weakens family values and harms children's stability. (FG1: P4)

Same-sex marriage goes against moral and religious beliefs that define family in our society. (FG3: P3)

These conflicting views demonstrate the tension between the persistence of traditional moral frameworks and the influence of globalizing modern values

on youth perceptions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The ambivalence towards modern family values is also documented in the research of Giddens (1992) and Lesthaeghe (2010), who argue that modernity creates pluralization of family forms and values, but does not eliminate traditional views.

The data show that students in Bosnia and Herzegovina navigate a complex landscape of family values, where modern ideals of freedom, equality, and flexibility coexist and sometimes clash with traditional moral expectations and cultural norms. This plurality of perspectives underscores the dynamic and contested nature of family transformation in transitional contexts.

Transformation of family value orientations

In response to the question "Are there noticeable changes in family values that are important to young people compared to previous generations?," participants revealed a dynamic and multifaceted transformation of family value orientations. Many highlighted the increased tolerance and acceptance toward LGBT communities, marking a shift toward broader social inclusivity. For instance, one participant noted,

> *There is a big difference, especially when we consider [views about] same-sex couples, which are becoming more common. Thus, the change is obvious in multiple aspects.* (FG2: P6)

This aligns with findings from Herek (2009) and Badgett (2013), who emphasize growing acceptance of sexual diversity among younger cohorts across diverse cultural contexts.

Gender equality was another prominent theme, with students emphasizing more equitable participation in household chores and childcare by men, alongside women's increased presence in the labor market and shared decision-making within families. As one participant stated,

> *The changes are quite visible, men are more involved in household chores and childcare, and women are more involved in the labor market.* (FG1: P4)

These observations correspond to sociological analyses by Kan et al. (2011) that document the gradual erosion of traditional gender roles and the rise of dual-earner households where domestic responsibilities are more equally shared.

When discussing the factors contributing to the family value system nurtured by young people, participants underscored the foundational role of family upbringing, education, and broader socio-cultural influences. One succinct summary was, *I would say religion and culture, but also upbringing and education* (FG1: P3), highlighting the complex interplay between personal, familial, and societal dimensions. This echoes research by Thornton and Lin (1994) and Bengtson et al. (2013), who underline how family socialization and cultural milieu shape intergenerational transmission of values.

Moreover, the media was recognized as a powerful agent in shaping young people's attitudes towards family and relationships. Participants frequently cited the media's role in exposing them to diverse family models and progressive ideas, fostering openness and sometimes generating tensions with traditional norms:

> *I see through series and movies how women and men behave differently in families today compared to the past, which sometimes confuses me because it differs from what I learned at home.* (FG2: P5)

> *Social media often promotes ideas of equality and freedom of choice within the family, which is positive, but sometimes it causes conflicts with older family members who are more traditional.* (FG3: P1)

> *The media shows me that it is normal for people to live together before marriage or to have different family arrangements, which is still not always accepted in our society.* (FG2: P3)

Despite progressive shifts, it is important to note the coexistence of ambivalence and resistance among youth. Some participants expressed uncertainty or critical views regarding certain modern family values, reflecting ongoing societal debates.

The data indicate that the transformation of students' family value orientations in Bosnia and Herzegovina reflects global patterns of increasing diversity, gender equality, and individualization, while continuing to be shaped by enduring influences of religion, culture, and the media. Students' narratives reveal a nuanced negotiation between traditional and modern values, highlighting an evolving yet still contested landscape of family life.

The future of family and family values

When asked about the most important family values they plan to teach their children in the future, participants consistently emphasized core principles such as mutual respect, love, honesty, and empathy. These values are seen as foundational for nurturing well-rounded and socially responsible individuals. The importance of open-mindedness, understanding, and support was also frequently highlighted, reflecting a progressive approach to child-rearing that balances tradition with contemporary social realities. Young people underscored the importance of respect not only within the immediate family but also toward the broader community, including parents, elders, and individuals with diverse personal choices and lifestyles. For example, one respondent succinctly stated, *Respect, culture, empathy* (FG2: P5), while another added, …*respect for elders, obedience, trust, respect for marriage as something sacred, solidarity, helping others.* (FG1: P3) These reflections align with previous research on family socialization that underscores the role of family values in promoting social cohesion and moral development (Kagitcibasi 2007; Smetana 2011).

When participants were asked whether they plan to raise their children according to traditional or modern values, many expressed a preference for a middle ground, aspiring to "take the best from both worlds." This hybrid approach reflects a negotiation between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to contemporary social changes, a theme identified in studies of family value transformations in transitional societies (Greenfield 2009). One participant noted, *I want to teach my child traditional values like respect and honesty, but also encourage freedom and open-mindedness* (FG1: P6), illustrating this balanced perspective.

The importance of family values for the future of Bosnian-Herzegovinian families and society was unanimously acknowledged by the participants. They perceive family as an irreplaceable institution, vital not only for individual identity and support but also as the foundational unit of society. This view is consistent with classical sociological theories, such as that of Parsons (1955), who conceptualized the family as the cornerstone of social order, and more contemporary research emphasizing the family's role in cultural transmission and social stability (Amato 2010; Cunningham 2001).

Moreover, the participants' perspectives reflect concerns about maintaining family cohesion amid societal challenges such as economic uncertainty, migration, and shifting social norms. Young people see the transmission of core family values as crucial for fostering resilience and continuity. This resonates with findings by Carroll and Doherty (2003), who argue that family value socialization is essential for preparing future generations to navigate complex social environments.

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study offers a comprehensive insight into the ongoing transformation of family dynamics and value orientations among students in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a society marked by rapid social change and persistent traditional legacies. Grounded in in-depth focus group discussions, the research captures the multifaceted experiences and perceptions of students as they negotiate between inherited traditional family norms and emerging modern ideals.

While this investigation is based on a single qualitative dataset, its findings resonate deeply with sociological and family studies theories, as well as with empirical research from transitional societies. The coexistence and contestation of traditional and modern family values, highlighted in this study, reflect patterns observed in other post-socialist and rapidly globalizing contexts (Dallos–Draper 2010; Walęcka-Matyja – Banach 2022). Such dynamics illustrate how social transformation is neither linear nor uniform but characterized by tensions and contradictions at the intersection of cultural heritage and contemporary influences.

The participants' narratives reveal that family remains the cornerstone of social life, imbued with deep emotional significance, yet simultaneously exposed to the destabilizing pressures of economic uncertainty, political instability, and shifting social norms. These external macro-structural factors directly impact family formation processes, marital stability, and intergenerational relations. Statistical data support this fragility, showing rising divorce rates and postponed marriages in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Šadić et al. 2020; BHAS 2023), which mirror the participants' reflections on changing family trajectories and challenges.

A striking insight from the study is the enduring influence of parental and societal expectations rooted in traditional collectivist values. According to social learning theory and supported by findings from Keijer et al. (2018) and Zhou et al. (2023), young people's value systems and communication patterns closely mirror those of their parents. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, this intergenerational transmission is further reinforced by economic dependence and social structures that limit youth autonomy, which delays the full adoption of modern family models prevalent in Western contexts (Turčilo et al. 2019; Osmić et al. 2024; Dudić-Sijamija 2025). However, students also articulate an emergent openness toward modern family values such as gender equality, individual choice in partner selection, shared parental responsibilities, and recognition of diverse family forms. These perspectives illustrate a complex negotiation, where young people both challenge and reaffirm traditional norms, embodying what

Walęcka-Matyja and Banach (2022) describes as a "hybridization" of family values in transitional societies.

The tensions between tradition and modernity manifest in ambivalent attitudes towards cohabitation, premarital sexual relationships, and divorce, with some young people expressing acceptance and others voicing moral reservations. Such ambivalence underscores the fluidity of social norms and the uneven pace of cultural change within families and communities.

Moreover, the participants' reflections point to the role of broader societal and economic pressures in shaping family experiences. High youth unemployment, political fragmentation, and a lack of social safety nets contribute to delayed family formation and uncertainty about future parenting roles. These factors compound the difficulties of maintaining cohesive family units and transmitting stable value systems across generations.

Ultimately, this qualitative exploration reveals that the Bosnian-Herzegovinian youth stand at a crossroads, negotiating inherited traditional family values and emerging modern norms amidst significant societal transformations. Their lived experiences offer critical insights into the processes of value continuity and change, highlighting the need for context-sensitive social policies and support mechanisms that bridge generational divides and promote family resilience.

CONCLUSION

This study provides insights into the changes and complexities of family values among students in Bosnia and Herzegovina, highlighting their position between traditional and modern norms. The youth demonstrate awareness of ongoing transformations within families and society, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of preserving key values such as love, respect, and mutual support. Their perceptions reflect the social, cultural, and economic challenges they face, including shifts in gender roles, demographic trends, and pressures of modern life. This dynamic interplay between past and present shapes their attitudes and expectations regarding the future of the family in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

While this study focused specifically on students, who represent a distinct and important segment of the youth population, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The qualitative approach and relatively small sample size restrict the generalizability of the findings to all young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nonetheless, the study provides valuable insights into emerging

trends and shifts in family values, highlighting students' negotiation between traditional and modern norms. These findings offer a foundation for further research and can inform policies and programs aimed at supporting family stability and addressing contemporary social changes.

For future studies, it is recommended to expand the sample to include diverse demographic and regional groups of youth, as well as to employ mixed methods that would allow for a deeper and broader analysis. It would also be beneficial to explore the influence of modern media, technology, and migration on the formation of family values among youth. Such approaches could further enrich the understanding of the complex processes of family transformation in contemporary Bosnian-Herzegovinian society and provide guidance for the development of policies and programs supporting youth and families.

REFERENCES

Abbott, E. (2014) *Istorija Braka* [A History of Marriage]. Belgrade (Serbia), Geopoetika Academy.

Amato, R. P. (2000) The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 62, No. 4., pp. 1269–1287, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01269.x.

Amato, R. P. (2010) Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 72, No. 3., pp. 650–666, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00723.x.

Badgett, M. V. L. (2013) *The Economic Case for LGBT Equality: Why Fair Treatment Benefits Us All*. Boston (US), Beacon Press.

Bauman, Z. (2009) *Fluidna ljubav* [Fluid Love. On the Frailty of Human Bonds]. Novi Sad (Serbia), Mediterran Publishing.

Beck, U. (2001) *Rizično Društvo: U Susret Novoj Moderni* [Risky Society: Towards a New Modernity]. Belgrade (Serbia), Filip Višnjić.

Beck, U. (2011) *Svetsko Rizično Društvo: U Potrazi za Izgubljenom Sigurnošću* [World Risk Society: In Search of Lost Security]. Novi Sad (Serbia), Akademska Knjiga.

Beck, U. – E. Beck-Gernsheim (1995) *The Normal Chaos of Love*. Cambridge (UK), Polity Press.

Bengtson, V. L. – R. Giarrusso – J. B. Mabry – M. Silverstein (2013) Solidarity, conflict, and ambivalence: Complementary or competing perspectives on intergenerational relationships? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 64, No. 3., pp. 568–576, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00568.x.

BHAS – Agency for Statistics of Bosnia Hercegovina (2023) *Demography 2022*. Sarajevo (Bosnia Hercegovina), BHAS. Available at the website of Agency for Statistics of Bosnia Hercegovina bhas.gov.ba. [Last access: 01 15 2024.]

Bobić, M. (2003) *Brak ili/i partnerstvo-demografsko sociološka studija* [Marriage or/and partnership-demographic sociological study]. Belgrade (Serbia), Faculty of Philosophy – Institute for Sociological Research of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade.

Braun, V. – V. Clarke (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 2., pp. 77–101, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Buljubašić, S. – S. Šadić (2021) *Socijalni rad s djecom i porodicama u riziku* [Social Work with Children and Families at Risk]. Sarajevo (Bosnia Hercegovina), Faculty of Political Sciences Sarajevo, University of Sarajevo.

Čamo, M. (2021) Savremena porodica i tradicija [Contemporary Family and Tradition]. In: Džafić, A. – S. Bakić – A. Mujkić – S. Turčalo (eds.): *Razumijevanje Društva* [Understanding Society]. pp. 190–195, Sarajevo (BiH), Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo.

Carroll, J. S. – W. J. Doherty (2003) Evaluating the effectiveness of premarital prevention programs: A meta-analytic review of outcome research. *Family Relations*, Vol. 52, No. 2., pp. 105–118, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2003.00105.x.

Cherlin, A. J. (2004) The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 66, No. 4., pp. 848–861, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00058.x

Coltrane, S. (2000) Research on household labor: Modeling and measuring the social embeddedness of routine family work. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 62, No. 4., pp. 1208–1233, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01208.x.

Cunningham, M. (2001) The influence of parental attitudes and behaviors on children's attitudes toward gender and household labor in early adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 63, No. 1., pp. 111–122, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00111.x.

Dallos, R. – R. Draper (2012) *Sistemska porodična psihoterapija: Teorija i praksa* [An Introduction to Family Therapy: Systemic Theory and Practice]. Novi Sad (Serbia), Psihopolis Institut.

Data on young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ministry of Civil Affairs BIH, Available at: www.mladi.gov.ba, [Last access: 01 15 2024].

Dudić-Sijamija, A. (2025) Porodične vrijednosti mladih u Bosni i Hercegovini. [Family Values Among Youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina]. *Context. Journal*

of Interdisciplinary Studies, Vol. 12, No. 1., pp. 95–119, DOI: https://doi.org/1 0.55425/23036966.2025.12.1.95.

Fromm, E. (1956) *Umijeće ljubavi* [The Art of Love]. Zagreb (Yugoslavia), Školska knjiga.

Giddens, A. (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies.* Stanford (US), Stanford University Press.

Giddens, A. (1994) *The Transformation of Intimacy.* Cambridge (UK), Polity Press.

Greenfield, P. M. (2009) Linking social change and developmental change: Shifting pathways of human development. *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 45, No. 2., pp. 401–418, DOI: https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0014726.

Haralambos, M. – M. Holborn (2002) *Sociologija: Teme i perspektive* [Sociology: Themes and Perspectives]. Zagreb (Croatia): Golden marketing.

Herek, G. M. (2009) Sexual Stigma and Sexual Prejudice in the United States: A Conceptual Framework. In: Hope, D. A. (ed.): *Contemporary Perspectives on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities.* Chapter 4, pp. 65–111, New York (US), Springer, DOI: https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1007/978-0-387-09556-1_4.

Inglehart, R. – P. Norris (2003) *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*. Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press.

Kagitcibasi, Ç. (2007) *Family, Self, and Human Development Across Cultures: Theory and Applications.* New York (US), Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315205281.

Kalmijn, M. (2011) The influence of men's income and employment on marriage and cohabitation: Testing Oppenheimer's theory in Europe. *European Journal of Population*, Vol. 27., pp. 269–293, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-011-9238-x.

Kan, M. Y. – O. Sullivan – J. Gershuny (2011) Gender convergence in domestic work: Discerning the effects of interactional and institutional barriers from large-scale data. *Sociology*, Vol. 45, No. 2., 234–251, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038510394014.

Keijer, M. G. – A. Liefbroer – I. Nagel (2018) Adolescents' expectations about the timing of family life events: Unraveling the role of value transmission and modeling. *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 39, No. 15., pp. 3755–3777, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X18792654.

Khazaie, R. G. (2016) Family values in global perspective. *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Family Studies*, 2016., DOI: https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119085621.wbefs401.

Kluckhohn, C. (1951) Values and Value-Orientations in the Theory of Action. In: Parsons, T. – E. A. Shils (eds.): *Toward a General Theory of Action.* pp. 388–433, Cambridge (MA, US), Harvard University Press.

Koerner, A. F. – M. A. Fitzpatrick (2002) Toward a theory of family communication. *Communication Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 1., pp. 70–91, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00260.x.

Košarac, B. (2019) *Izazovi savremene porodice* [Challenges of the Modern Family]. Srajevo (BiH), Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Istočnom Sarajevu, (Dis-copy).

Krug, E. G. – J. A. Mercy – L. L. Dahlberg – A. B. Zwi (2002) The world report on violence and health. *The Lancet*, Vol. 360, Art. no. 9339., pp. 1083–1088, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(02)11133-0.

Laumann, E. O., Ellingson, S., Mahay, J., Paik, A., & Youm, Y. (2005) *The sexual organization of the city.* University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Lesthaeghe, R. (2010) The unfolding story of the second demographic transition. *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2., pp. 211–251, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2010.00328.x.

Milić, A. (2007) *Sociologija porodice: Kritika i izazovi.* [Sociology of the Family: Criticism and Challenges]. 2nd Edition, Belgrade (Serbia), Čigoja štampa.

Noller, P. – J. A. Feeney (2004) *Understanding Marriage: Developments in the Study of Couple Interaction.* Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press.

Oatley, K. (2005) *Emocije: Kratka historija* [Emotions: A Brief History]. Belgrade (Serbia), Clio.

Osmić, A. – L. Turčilo – N. Mujagić et al. (2024) *Youth Study Bosnia and Herzegovina – Exploring the Position, Opinions and Attitudes of Young People in Bosnia and Herzegovina.* Sarajevo (BiH), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Sarajevo.

Parsons, T. (1955) The American Family: Its Relations to Personality and to the Social Structure. In: Parsons, T. – R. F. Bales (eds.): *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process.* Chapter 1, pp. 3–33, Glencoe (IL, US), Free Press.

Pašalić-Kreso, A. (2004) *Koordinate obiteljskog odgoja* [Coordinates of Family Upbringing]. Sarajevo (BiH), Jež.

Plopa, M. (2019) Rozwody jako niepokojące zjawisko współczesności. Psychologiczna perspektywa badań [Divorces as a disturbing phenomenon in modern times. A psychological perspective of research]. In: Rostowska, T. & A. Lewandowska-Walter (eds.): *Psychospołeczne konteksty relacji rodzinnych* [Psychosocial Contexts of Family Relationships]. pp. 117–148, Warsaw (Poland), Wydawnictwo Difin.

Putnam, Robert. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* New York (US) – London (UK), Simon & Schuster.

Šadić, S. – A. Ždralović – M. Emirhafizović (2020) *Jednoroditeljske porodice: Mapiranje prava i potreba samostalnih roditelja/ki na području općine*

Centar Sarajevo [Single-Parent Families Mapping the Rights and Needs of Independent Parents in the Area of the Municipality of Centar Sarajevo]. Sarajevo (BiH), Fondacija CURE.

Šakotić-Kurbalija, J. (2016) *Bračni odnosi u Srbiji: Povezanost kvaliteta, potencijala za razvod i spremnosti za traženje psihološke pomoći.* [Marital relations in Serbia: relationship between quality, potential for divorce and willingness to seek psychological help]. Novi Sad (Serbia), Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad.

Šakotić-Kurbalija, J. (2020) *Brak i stress: Funkcionalni i disfukcionalni partnerski odnosi* [Marriage and Stress: Functional and Dysfunctional Partner Relationships]. Novi Sad (Serbia), Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad.

Sayer, Liana. C. (2010). Trends in housework. In: Treas, J. − S. Drobnič (eds.): *Dividing the domestic: Men, women, and household work in cross-national perspective* Chapter 2, pp. 19–36, Stanford (US), Stanford University Press.

Schwartz, S. H. (1992) Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 25, pp. 1–65, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60281-6.

Smetana, J. G. (2011) *Adolescents, Families, and Social Development: How Teens Construct Their Worlds*. Hoboken (US), Wiley-Blackwell.

Smock, P. J. (2000). Cohabitation in the United States: An appraisal of research themes, findings, and implications. *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 26, pp. 1–20, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.1.

Sofradžija, H. (2021) Savremni svijet i povijesna transformacija društva [The Modern World and the Historical Transformation of Society]. In: Džafić, A. − S. Bakić − A. Mujkić − S. Turčalo (eds.): *Razumijevanje Društva* [Understanding Society]. pp. 190–195, Sarajevo (BiH), Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo.

Stjepanović-Zaharievski, D. − J. Petrović (2014) Percepcija braka, obitelji i roditeljstva studentske mladeži u svjetlu demografskih i društvenih odrednica. [The Perception of Marriage, Family and Parenthood Among Student Youth in the Light of Demographic and Social Determinants]. In: Stjepanović-Zaharievski, D. − G. Đorić − G. Stojić (eds.): *Kulturnim orijentacijama studenata i kultura mira na Balkanu.* [Cultural Orientations of Students and the Culture of Peace in The Balkans]. Niš (Serbia), Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš.

Thornton, A. − H.-S. Lin (1994) *Social Change and the Family in Taiwan*. Chicago (US), University of Chicago Press.

Turčilo, L. – A. Osmić – D. Kapidžić et al. (2019) *Youth Study Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018/2019.* Berlin (Germany), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

UNICEF (2018) *Child protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina. UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina.* https://www.unicef.org/bih/en/reports/child-protection-bosnia-and-herzegovina

Walęcka-Matyja, K. – A. Banach (2022) Family values as predictors of the quality of close relationships. *Przegląd Psychologiczny* [The Review of Psychology], Vol. 65, No. 1., pp. 137–159, DOI: https://doi.org/10.31648/przegldpsychologiczny.8544.

World Bank (2020) Bosnia and Herzegovina economic update: Navigating the challenges. World Bank Group. https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/431931585262527674/bosnia-and-herzegovina-economic-update

Zhou, X. – J. Huang – S. Qin – K. Tao – Y. Ning (2023) Family intimacy and adolescent peer relationships: Investigating the mediating role of psychological capital and the moderating role of self-identity. *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 14, p. 165830, DOI: https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1165830.