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Abstract: Youth represent both a valuable social resource and a significant challenge for every society due to their dynamic nature and potential for both positive and negative development. This paper examines the central role of the family in shaping youth identity, values, and social responsibility amid contemporary social and cultural changes. It argues that the growing identity crisis among young people is closely associated with the weakening of moral and faith-based values, which have traditionally been transmitted through the family. As the primary institution of socialization, the family nurtures personal identity, emotional stability, and moral character while guiding young people toward responsible decision-making. However, effective guidance depends on parents possessing adequate educational, cultural, and social competencies. The study further highlights the increasing influence of mass media and social media, which often promote superficial values and contribute to cultural alienation, particularly among youth lacking strong historical and cultural foundations. It emphasizes that educators, parents, and governments share responsibility for addressing these challenges through coordinated educational and social policies. Youth development requires not only intellectual education but also moral, emotional, and social formation supported by family involvement from early childhood. The paper concludes that knowledge alone is insufficient to produce meaningful and responsible lives unless reinforced by values, affection, and practical guidance within the family. Strengthening families through educational support and implementing comprehensive youth policies that encourage civic participation, cultural awareness, and constructive social roles are essential for promoting healthy youth development. Such integrated efforts can reduce identity confusion, enhance social cohesion, and enable young people to contribute positively to society while preserving cultural and moral values.

Introduction

The family institution has emerged throughout human history as one of the most important social institutions and as a unique social system. The family is the primary institution through which human beings acquire their most essential characteristics. To date, no other structure or system has successfully replaced the role fulfilled by the family.

From the moment an individual enters life, the family is the only institution capable of providing the psychological and social conditions necessary for healthy development. After birth, individuals receive numerous influences from both their family and the society to which they belong. These influences constitute the spiritual and moral dimensions of personality. Biological and physiological factors such as heredity, hormones, instincts, drives, and intelligence form the material basis of personality. Many of these biological characteristics are shared with animals. What fundamentally distinguishes human beings from animals is what they acquire through social life (Köknél, 2005, p. 82).

These observations demonstrate that the psychological and social dimensions of human beings represent the most refined aspects of personality. Many of the factors that contribute to the development of a mature personality emerge within the intimate and balanced environment of the family.

Therefore, when the family—where character formation and socialization first begin—fails to perform its functions effectively, various social problems are likely to arise. In this respect, women, who traditionally play a central role in family education and guidance, undertake a significant responsibility and contribute greatly to society. Similar contributions can also be achieved through women's active participation in formal and non-formal educational institutions (Şener, 2025, p. 3).

Society, as the principal social organization through which individuals express themselves, requires people to acquire certain qualities that enable them to become healthy members of the social order. However, the most important factor in shaping society and providing it with social coherence is the existence and effort of the family. Individuals are largely prepared for social life within the family environment.

Through family interaction, individuals acquire social characteristics and develop their personalities. Within the social systems to which they belong, individuals learn the expectations associated with their social statuses through the process of socialization. Roles are learned in the family, school, and workplace, and this learning process constitutes an integral component of socialization. The social roles first acquired within the family continue to influence behavior throughout life.

Socialization and the Family

The family should be regarded as a comprehensive social unit due to the multiple functions it performs. The concept of family refers not merely to a group of individuals living together but to a social institution composed of various social and legal relationships. Within the family, individuals acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for fulfilling the social roles required by society. Moreover, the family encompasses a system of rights, responsibilities, and obligations governing relationships among spouses, parents, children, and extended family members.

As a social institution, the family has existed throughout recorded human history. During this long historical process, society and the family have remained in constant interaction. Since societies are composed of individuals living within family structures, the continuation of society depends largely upon the family's ability to raise healthy and responsible generations (Doğan, 2009, p. 1).

Socialization emerges through the development of balanced and healthy relationships between individuals, society, and their environment. Youth represents a stage of life during which individuals seek purpose, direction, and meaning while acquiring the skills and personality traits necessary for fulfilling professional, social, and family roles in adulthood.

The principal psychological characteristics of this developmental period include identity crises, rebellious tendencies, the search for life goals, the development of responsibility, the pursuit of personal fulfillment, and a desire for adventure and activity. During this stage, cognitive abilities mature,

professional aspirations develop, meaningful attitudes toward the future are formed, and creative tendencies begin to emerge.

The increasing desire to participate in social issues, efforts to formulate personal opinions, idealistic aspirations, enthusiasm, and sensitivity to injustice and inequality are among the most positive characteristics of youth. These qualities contribute significantly to the development of a productive, healthy, and socially integrated personality.

Verdon, in his anthropological discussion of kinship, family, and marriage, argues that autonomous and independent individuals require social frameworks based on values, norms, and beliefs in order to socialize effectively and express themselves within society. Through these frameworks, kinship evolves into a form of social grouping. According to Verdon's interpretation of Lévi-Strauss, kinship is not only a natural and psychological phenomenon but also a social bond structured and defined through relationships (Demez, 2012, p. 98).

Despite its crucial role in educating individuals and transmitting social values, the family has periodically been subjected to ideological and political pressures. Certain political doctrines have attempted to reduce or eliminate the functions of the family by granting the state authority over areas traditionally managed by family institutions. Russia, followed by Germany and Italy, undertook significant efforts to weaken traditional family structures by abolishing established family laws. During similar periods, family responsibility also began to decline in the United States (Zimmerman, 1968).

The ideology associated with the so-called "Permissive Society," which promoted unrestricted lifestyles and encouraged young people to pursue immediate gratification, consumption, and entertainment, significantly influenced post-war generations. Advertising industries and consumer culture provided unprecedented opportunities for indulgence in consumption, leisure, and pleasure. The social consequences of these developments became evident during the period between 1948 and 1968, particularly among younger generations. Experiences such as the Vietnam War further intensified intergenerational conflicts, resulting in alienation between younger and older generations and contributing to family fragmentation. Consequently, various programs aimed at restoring family cohesion and repairing family relationships were introduced (Aşçıoğlu, 1987, p. 269).

The transformation of industrial societies has also produced profound changes within family structures. Family responsibilities have evolved significantly as women have increasingly participated in the workforce. Industrialization has altered traditional domestic patterns, reducing household labor and increasing reliance on external services. It has been suggested that, as industrialization progresses, activities such as meal preparation and childcare may increasingly be transferred to institutional settings, thereby reducing the domestic responsibilities traditionally carried by women (Russell & Bertrand, 1979, p. 38).

The Necessity of a Family-Centered Life

In collectivist societies, values such as respect, commitment to tradition, and religious belief occupy a more central position in social life. These values influence marital relationships and contribute to a more elevated perception of marriage. One of the most evident manifestations of this cultural orientation is the social disapproval of divorce. In East Asian societies, for example, family unity, loyalty, and self-sacrifice are emphasized more strongly within family relationships (Toth & Kemmelmeier, 2009, p. 281). Concerned about the increasing number of fragmented families resulting from divorce and the social problems associated with family breakdown, many scholars have focused on both preventive and rehabilitative approaches. Specialists seek to develop strategies that prevent divorce before it occurs while simultaneously helping parents and children adapt more successfully when divorce becomes

unavoidable (Battal, 2008, p. 21).

Relationships between young men and women should be reconsidered within frameworks that reflect the cultural and moral realities of society rather than simply replicating Western models of social life. Extramarital relationships have become increasingly normalized in many societies. Consequently, it is important to establish clear social and moral boundaries regarding love, marriage, and interpersonal relationships and to communicate these boundaries through educational and cultural channels, including media and film.

Modernist approaches to family life should be critically reassessed. The social, psychological, and moral dimensions of family relationships require careful regulation and support so that families are protected from unstable and unsustainable value systems.

Although industrialization has undoubtedly transformed family and kinship structures in many societies, it is misleading to assume that the transition from extended families to nuclear families represents a universal pattern. Research suggests that this transformation reflects the specific historical experience of Western societies rather than an inevitable global development (Demez, 2012, pp. 98–99).

The social, economic, and cultural transformations associated with modernity have reopened debates concerning family roles and functions. The emergence of modern institutions, changing value systems, individualization, and liberalization have become major driving forces behind these discussions. As modern institutions increasingly assume responsibilities traditionally performed by families, conventional marital relationships are altered, potentially increasing the likelihood of divorce (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006, pp. 29–30).

The growing participation of women in the workforce, both in Türkiye and in Western societies, has largely been driven by economic necessity. Economic crises, rising living costs, changing consumption patterns, and increasing expectations regarding standards of living have created a greater demand for dual-income households. These conditions have increased the opportunity cost of remaining outside the labor market and consequently expanded women's participation in employment.

A closer examination of the issue reveals that the increasing orientation toward consumer lifestyles and luxury consumption has also contributed to the need for additional household income. In reality, only a portion of women enter employment primarily to meet essential family needs; many others are influenced by broader socioeconomic transformations affecting contemporary lifestyles.

The emergence of doubts regarding the necessity and value of the family institution reflects a perspective that contradicts both social realities and historical experience. Such arguments are rarely supported by serious research or empirical evidence. Instead, they often reflect the preferences of a small minority seeking unrestricted lifestyles for personal reasons. If the family institution were eliminated, there remains no convincing alternative capable of regulating human relationships and ensuring social continuity in an equally effective manner.

Family and Youth

The relationship between youth and the family begins in childhood and continues throughout life, gradually acquiring deeper intellectual, emotional, and psychological dimensions. In the development of personality, the family serves as a source of affection, social roles, solidarity, and an ideal environment for living. For young people, as for all individuals, the family functions as a vital refuge and a primary setting for spiritual and moral development.

Within the family environment, young people learn how to interact with others, establish relationships, and adapt to social life. Through interactions with parents and siblings, they acquire practical knowledge and life experiences that prepare them for adulthood. The family represents a small but significant

social community in which moral principles, cultural traditions, spiritual values, and ideals of humanity are both taught and practiced. It is within the family that individuals first encounter the fundamental elements of a worldview and receive guidance concerning life's purpose and responsibilities. In this sense, the foundational values of intellectual and moral development are largely transmitted through family life. This pattern can be observed across different cultures and societies.

During adolescence and early adulthood, young people strive to achieve a mature social status and develop a coherent sense of personal identity. As Stone and Church (1968) observed, "the central task of adolescence is the acquisition of an identity that enables the individual to understand who he or she is, what values and beliefs are important, and what is expected from life." Adolescents who experience emotional or psychological distance from their families may encounter feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and depression.

The tendency to establish strong relationships with peer groups is one of the defining characteristics of adolescence. Young people often find themselves caught between family expectations and their own emerging identities. Peer groups provide opportunities to share emotions, express concerns, develop social identities, and extend interests beyond the family environment. However, the influence of peer groups is not always positive. In some cases, adolescents may escape parental pressure only to become subject to peer pressure, which may hinder their personal development and limit their ability to achieve genuine independence.

The values and norms of the social environment also play a crucial role in shaping youthful behavior. Peer groups can provide valuable support in helping young people cope with tensions arising from family expectations and social pressures. They may assist adolescents in expressing their concerns and overcoming personal crises in constructive ways (Heyet, 1986, p. 4).

Youth represents both a significant social resource and a potential source of social problems. For this reason, societies have always sought to guide and educate younger generations through various institutional mechanisms. The dynamic nature of youth simultaneously creates opportunities and risks. Positive capacities such as creativity, idealism, and energy should be encouraged and developed, while negative tendencies should be addressed through education, guidance, and social support.

One of the most significant challenges facing contemporary youth is the problem of identity formation. The weakening of connections with fundamental value systems, particularly faith and morality, has intensified this challenge. Young people often lack the maturity and experience necessary to confront such issues independently. Since their personalities are still developing, they remain particularly vulnerable to external influences and ideological pressures.

Various ideological movements frequently seek to influence young people in order to advance broader social and political agendas. Because adolescents often lack fully developed long-term perspectives, they may become susceptible to manipulation. Furthermore, the intensity of emotional and biological drives characteristic of youth can increase vulnerability to consumerism, entertainment-oriented lifestyles, and materialistic values. Young people are therefore often targeted by commercial and ideological forces seeking to shape their attitudes and behaviors.

Another characteristic of youth is the tendency for decision-making to be influenced more by emotions than by rational deliberation. Young people are naturally attracted to excitement, novelty, and emotionally stimulating experiences. As a result, they often gravitate toward individuals, groups, or movements that satisfy these emotional needs.

One of the most significant negative consequences of contemporary educational systems and mass communication technologies is the gradual separation of young people from the emotional support and

guidance traditionally provided by families. Media institutions frequently promote foreign cultural models and encourage excessive consumption. Such influences complicate educational efforts and may contribute to moral and cultural alienation.

Family elders, because of their life experience and accumulated wisdom, are often best positioned to provide guidance regarding the challenges faced by young people. In addition, respected figures such as teachers, mentors, and community leaders can play important roles in the moral and intellectual development of younger generations.

Youth is fundamentally shaped through education. Education influences not only intellectual development but also emotional, moral, and spiritual growth. At its core, education represents the process through which a society transmits its preferred way of life, values, and cultural heritage to future generations. Within a high-quality educational system, young people are provided with opportunities to develop strong intellectual and social identities.

The success of this process depends upon the broader civilization, cultural tradition, and philosophy of life embraced by society. Today, many individuals, including adults, experience uncertainty regarding their values, social identities, and life purposes. Such uncertainty often diminishes their ability to find meaning and satisfaction in life.

During adolescence, young people acquire the capacity for abstract thinking and begin critically evaluating the behaviors, expectations, and beliefs of parents and other authority figures. Although selecting the most appropriate attitudes and behaviors during this developmental stage is rarely easy, the family performs an essential function by helping children interpret, evaluate, and selectively adopt cultural values.

The family transmits traditions, customs, social norms, and systems of rewards and sanctions. Through this process, young people gradually develop their own value systems and personal identities. These values emerge largely as a consequence of family influence and socialization (Cihan, 1979, p. 21).

Biological and physiological developments associated with adolescence also contribute to the complexity of youth development. During this period, young people actively seek knowledge and attempt to understand both themselves and the world around them. Unfortunately, social attitudes toward youth are often characterized by prejudice, criticism, and accusations of irresponsibility. Such negative perceptions can create additional barriers to healthy development and make the challenges of adolescence even more difficult to overcome (Özoğlu, 1988, p. 167).

Scholars emphasize that adolescents frequently experience a sense of personal transformation during this period. These changes may lead to new behaviors, attitudes, and emotional responses. As a transitional stage characterized by self-discovery, adolescence is often accompanied by emotional fluctuations and behavioral changes that differ significantly from those observed during childhood.

Common characteristics of early adolescence include anxiety, sensitivity, dissatisfaction, impulsiveness, emotional instability, indecisiveness, reduced concentration on academic work, increased desires, egocentric tendencies, resistance to authority, dissatisfaction with restrictions, sensitivity to criticism, conflicts with loved ones, a desire for independence from family, increased attachment to peer groups, greater concern with appearance and fashion, and expanding social interests (Özoğlu, 1988, p. 170).

These developmental characteristics highlight the continuing importance of the family as a source of emotional support, moral guidance, identity formation, and social integration. In a rapidly changing social environment, the family remains one of the most effective institutions for helping young people navigate the challenges of modern life and develop into responsible, balanced, and socially engaged adults.

Conclusion

The family is an indispensable institution that fulfills the psychological, social, moral, and emotional needs of individuals, regardless of gender, age, or social status. Within the family environment, individuals acquire knowledge, gain experience, develop interpersonal skills, and prepare themselves for participation in wider social life. In this sense, the family functions as a transitional institution that bridges the gap between the individual and society.

The significance of the family extends far beyond its economic and practical functions. Its most fundamental contribution lies in its role in shaping and developing the psychological, moral, cultural, and social dimensions of human personality. Through the family, individuals learn values, responsibilities, social norms, and patterns of behavior that enable them to become productive members of society.

Despite its central importance, contemporary societies increasingly witness attempts to diminish the significance of the family through various cultural narratives and ideological influences. The widespread influence of media, digital communication technologies, and social media platforms has contributed to the construction of virtual environments that often weaken interpersonal relationships and reduce awareness of the family's essential social role. Whereas previous historical periods were characterized by direct state intervention in family life, contemporary societies face new challenges arising from the persuasive power of media and communication technologies. These influences are particularly significant for young people, who may be exposed to misleading information, unrealistic expectations, and forms of cultural alienation.

No technological, commercial, or media-based institution can fully replace the unique socializing functions of the family. Technology may facilitate communication, information exchange, and entertainment; however, it cannot provide the emotional security, moral guidance, personal commitment, and enduring interpersonal relationships that characterize family life. Consequently, efforts to weaken the influence of families, communities, and other social institutions while encouraging individuals to become increasingly isolated within virtual environments may have detrimental consequences for psychological well-being and social cohesion.

Removing individuals from meaningful family relationships risks creating emotional, social, and spiritual voids that cannot easily be filled by alternative institutions. The weakening of family life observed in many contemporary societies has frequently been accompanied by increases in social isolation, interpersonal violence, juvenile delinquency, psychological distress, and various forms of antisocial behavior. These developments suggest that the stability and strength of family institutions remain closely connected to broader patterns of social well-being.

The challenges confronting contemporary youth further reinforce the importance of strong family relationships. Young people require guidance, affection, moral education, and opportunities for healthy identity formation. Families provide the primary environment in which these developmental needs can be met. Through emotional support, value transmission, and socialization processes, families contribute significantly to the development of responsible, resilient, and socially engaged citizens.

For this reason, strengthening family institutions should be regarded as a major social policy objective. Educational systems, media organizations, civil society institutions, and governments should cooperate in supporting families and enhancing their capacity to fulfill their social functions. Policies aimed at youth development should recognize the family as a central partner in promoting psychological well-being, social integration, cultural continuity, and moral development.

In conclusion, historical experience and contemporary social realities demonstrate that the family

remains one of the most effective and indispensable institutions for sustaining social order, transmitting cultural values, and nurturing future generations. Rather than diminishing the role of the family, societies should seek to strengthen and support it as a foundation for individual development and collective well-being.

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