

# Characteristics, types and functions of family concept

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## ABSTRACT

The family, which has existed throughout human history, is a social institution. There are many definitions of the family, which is defined as the smallest cornerstone of societies consisting of a mother, father, and children. However, a universal definition of the family is quite difficult. As the smallest component of society, a family is a social unit with economic, psychological, biological, legal, and social aspects. This research aims to examine the concept of family, family types and family functions. The method of the study is a systematic literature review. Unlike other institutions, the roles and obligations that the family institution imposes on human beings continue from birth to death. Family types are classified in different ways. When analyzed in terms of family structure, values, and functioning in general, it is classified into two types "nuclear family" and "extended family". With today's social and economic changes and the increasing participation of women in working life, the family structure has also changed. Today's family structures have undergone significant changes as a result of urbanization, industrialization, and migration to big cities. Such a high number of divorce data shows that in modern times, the family is moving forward with different impulses and dynamics compared to the past. The duties and responsibilities of families have therefore changed in parallel with daily problems. While in the past the main purpose of marriage was to have children, today they expect more from marriage. As a result of the family's inability to fulfill its functions, the society in which it exists has also been affected and the social problems of the society have increased. In this study, within the scope of the literature, the concept of family, family characteristics, family types, and family functions were examined.

**Keywords:** Family, family concept, family types.

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## INTRODUCTION

As the most important part of the social structure, the family is the foundation of society, because it is where people take their first steps into social life (Dikici et al., 2020). The adventure of socialization starts in the family and continues until the end of his/her life as a result of the interaction he/she establishes with those around him/her and the institutions he/she is involved (Walsh, 2017). It is very difficult to define what constitutes a family and what it is. However, in general, the family is a social institution that ensures the continuation of the human lineage as a result of biological relationships, where the grouping period first emerged, where bilateral relations are ensured by certain rules, and which transfers the material and spiritual cultural values that have taken place in society until today to generations; it is a social institution with biological, psychological, economic, social,

legal, etc. sides (Sayın, 2020). According to the Turkish Language Association (2011), the family is defined as the smallest unit in society, based on the bonds of blood and marriage, formed by the relationships between siblings, husbands, wives, and children.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FAMILY

Unlike other institutions, the roles and obligations that the family institution imposes on human beings continue from birth to death. This is due to the characteristics of the family institution, which are different from other institutions. Gökçe (1976) lists these characteristics as follows: Family is universal, family is based on an emotional foundation, the family has a shaping

characteristic, family is limited in scope, family is a nucleus in social structure, family is surrounded by social rules, the family has a permanent and at the same time a temporary nature.

Minuchin (1974) defines the structure of the family as the rules governing the interaction of individuals within the family. In other words, family structure is the set of rules and principles that regulate the interactions of family members with each other. Within the family, each individual is affected by the behavior of the other individual. This ensures a certain stability and order in the ideas and actions of family members. Two important factors come to the fore when it comes to family members' relationships with each other (Minuchin, 1974). The first factor is the principles that apply to every family. For instance, there is a hierarchical structure in that parents and children have different levels of power positions within the family. The second factor is the hidden or open agreements that are formed in ordinary interactions that can be considered unique to that family, which include the expectations of family members from each other (Akün, 2013).

## TYPES OF FAMILIES

There are many classifications regarding the concept of family. Gladding (2011) explained the most frequently used of these by listing them as follows: *The nuclear family* is a model consisting of a mother, father, and children. It plays an important role in socializing children and transmitting the culture of society. *The family formed through remarriage* is a family structure in which at least one spouse has been married before and at least one spouse has children from a previous marriage. *One-parent family* is a family model consisting of one parent who has sole responsibility for the adopted or biological child or children. *Childless families* are who are in a constant effort not to have children or who cannot have children due to age or medical reasons. *A gay/lesbian family* is a structure formed by families with same-sex partners, who have never had children, or who have children from a previous relationship, or who have children later on. *Dual-career families* are families where both spouses work and feel committed to their jobs. For these parents, balancing career realities and family life is extremely important. These families have to constantly evaluate and review their work and family lives to find the balance they want and to maintain their coexistence. *Elderly family* is a type of family where the spouses are 65 years of age or older. *Families with grandparents as the head of the family* are family models consisting of grandparents who take care of the grandchildren. *Multigenerational family* is a family with parents, children, grandparents, and grandmothers. *Military Families*; are family types consisting of individuals within the armed forces.

When analyzed in terms of family structure, values, and functioning in general, it is classified into two types "nuclear family" and "extended family". However, as a result of rapid developments and changing balances, it has become necessary to add a third family type to this classification, which can be called the "transition family" (Özgüven, 2001). *Extended family*: Family members in this model consist of relatives such as the mother, father, married and unmarried children, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, grandchildren, and sometimes siblings of the father who is the head of the family (Kayaalp, 2007; Güney, 2009). *Nuclear family* is the place where primary emotions are most intense. *Transition family* is a type of family that emerged as a result of migration from rural to urban areas, is not individualized in terms of emotions and thoughts in the interaction within the family, and maintains its rules, traditions, and beliefs (Özgüven, 2001). As in Turkey, it is a family model that is frequently encountered in societies where the transition from a land-dependent production society to an industrialized production society has begun and developed rapidly. In such societies, the tendency to adopt individual rights and freedoms, a rapid increase in population, progress in the modern way of governance, and a tendency to secure them are also accompanied (Dönmezer, 1999).

There are many studies on family types. As an example of these studies, in a study on family and family types by Birsen (1976), the following family types were mentioned: *Disintegrated families* are families in which widows and children live together, formed by the death, separation or divorce of the husband or wife of the parents. *Incomplete families* are families consisting of mothers and children born from illegitimate unions. In the study on family types in various human societies conducted by Erdentuğ (1980), the following two family types were basically mentioned: *Polyandry families* are an uncommon family model found in a few communities. It is a type of family in which a woman is married to more than one man. *Polygynous families* are family models in which a man is married to more than one woman. A man is considered to have a nuclear family with each woman he is married to and their children.

## FUNCTIONS OF THE FAMILY

It is important for the continuation and consistency of social life that values and rules are learned in family life (Çağan, 2016). With modernization, the number of children has decreased due to reasons such as the inclusion of women in business life, the fact that children are not seen as an economic factor, and the increase in the costs of raising and educating children. These are acceptable reasons from a generalizing point of view. The main problem is that with the increase in the concept of family, responsibility and individualization have started to dissolve and social life has been disformed (Bayer,

2013). The family has different functions. These include:

**The biological function of the family:** is to meet the basic needs and desires of individuals. Through the institution of marriage, individuals have functions such as fulfilling sexual desires, having children, and ensuring the continuation of the generation (Özalp, 2016; Çağan, 2016).

**The psychological function of the family:** The loving environment between parents and children is the first element to overcome every difficulty. An environment of love is the most valuable spiritual element for a child. The individual experiencing spiritual fulfillment forms a healthy personality and identity (Kır, 2011).

**The economic function of the family:** All family members work within the framework of a certain division of labor. They spend time working together and their relationship is cordial and strong. People gain the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to sustain their lives and make a living in the family in systems where the economic structure based on human labor is dominant (Çağan, 2016).

**The protective function of the family:** While the traditional family carries out protective and security work, this understanding has been left to state protection, although not completely in the nuclear family. The state pursues a policy based on protecting not only the family but also children, the elderly, and the disabled (Epik et al., 2017).

**The educational function of the family:** The process of education ensures the socialization of people and on the other hand, ensures their adaptation to social life. Family members, especially children, are equipped with knowledge and values that will facilitate their adaptation to society. Through this process, family members develop, become stronger, and learn what to do, how to do it, and what they need to improve to gain a respectable place in society (Nirun, 1994; cited in Çağan, 2016).

**The religious function of the family:** The main purpose of the institution of family and religion is to raise people who are sensitive to society. Since the influence of religion is seen in the environments where children enter into social communication, the family institution alone is not sufficient (Özalp, 2016).

**Family leisure function:** In traditional societies, except for religious ceremonies, holidays, or special days, the workload of life is high and the understanding of entertainment is limited (Çağan, 2016).

**The prestige-providing function of the family:** Education provided by the family affects the prestige of

the individual, as the family is the smallest building block of society and the first step in socialization. We take on certain statuses brought by our family from the past and the family's means take the lead in many matters, including the education we receive (Aktaş, 2015; Bozkurt, 2007).

**Socialization function of the family:** As the family socializes the child, culture is passed on from generation to generation (Özkalp, 2008; Dikici et al., 2020). There are three functions of the nuclear family: Reproduction, socialization of young individuals, and ensuring the psychological balance between spouses (Sertelin, 2003).

The functions of extended families can be listed as follows: Economic functions, prestige functions, educational functions, protective functions, religious functions, biological/childbearing functions, entertainment and recreation functions, and the function providing psychological and spiritual satisfaction (Doğan, 2010; Çağan, 2013, Walsh, 2017).

## CONCLUSION

The family, which has existed throughout human history, is a social institution. The importance of the concept of family is increasing day by day. It has become almost impossible to talk about a single-family type. Cultural changes such as the rise of the self and individual identity have changed the perspective on the family (Herek, 2006; Ertan, 2012). The functionalist approach to the family argues that the nuclear family in modern societies performs certain specialized roles that help maintain social order and benefit the needs of society (Giddens, 2008). Such a high number of divorce data today shows that in modern times, the family is moving forward with different impulses and dynamics compared to the past. Both the need for security and the large number of individuals in terms of the labor force have made it difficult for the family to stay together in these societies (Zencirkıran, 2018). While in the past the main purpose of marriage was to have children, today they expect more from marriage. Unlike in the past, marriages have come to expect intense emotional bonding, sexual compatibility, friendship, etc. from each other. This high level of expectation among individuals has made it difficult to realize marriages focused on longevity (Köse, 2016). It was observed that economic needs predominate in primitive societies, such as the desire to have children in ancient civilizations and love in modern civilizations (Dündar, 2017). Within the family, women are emotional, and obedient and fulfill the need for love. In addition to providing income for the family economy, men are creative, original, and leaders (Güçlü, 2018).

In terms of structural characteristics, the family is divided and classified into "nuclear family" and "extended

family", but in transitional societies with rapid developments, it is necessary to add "transitional family" as a third family type (Özgüven, 2001). In some cases, differentiations emerge in the structure and functions of the family. The reason is the transition from the traditional family to the nuclear family. In this process of change, not only family models but even the concept of family is being discussed. As a result of this process, the division of roles within the family became more democratic. The sense of "us" in the traditional structure has been replaced by the sense of "me" in the core structure (Bayer, 2013). The traditional family is a patriarchal system in which the mother, father, children, and elders live together. The nuclear family is a modern family system consisting of a mother, father, and children. The transition from the traditional family model to the nuclear family model has been influenced by industrialization, modernization, and urbanization (Duman, 2012).

As a result, the concept of family is of great importance for societies. The concept of family, which is very important for humanity, has had different characteristics in recent years. The concept of family is classified in different ways. The family has multiple functions. It is necessary to protect the family. Family education should be given in order to protect family awareness.

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