



## The psychological aspect of youth's perceptions of love and marriage in conditions of socio-psychological uncertainty

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**Abstract.** In the complex and unstable realities of Ukrainian society in recent years, significant changes have been observed in marriage and family processes, and therefore the problem of the psychological foundations and characteristics of the development of contemporary youth's perceptions of love and marriage was relevant and required thorough research. The aim of the study was to identify the psychological characteristics of contemporary Ukrainian youth's perceptions of love and marriage in conditions of socio-psychological uncertainty. The main research methods were a written survey using Google Forms and quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. The results showed that for modern youth in conditions of socio-psychological uncertainty, love and romance are worldview values of present and future life. As for the values of starting a family and getting married, they turned out to be irrelevant for modern youth. The young people surveyed had highly differentiated ideas about love and romance, emphasising such fundamental psychological characteristics of love as the highest human feeling: depth, duration, stability, strength, awareness, unconditional acceptance of a partner, responsibility, devotion, trust, care, etc. In their ideas about love, modern young people noted its emotional and moral-ethical components, as well as emphasising the joint activity aspect of partner relationships in love. At the same time, modern youth showed duality in their understanding and attitude towards love, demonstrating, on the one hand, a rational approach to feelings of love and, on the other hand, an irrational approach. In the perceptions of young people, a long period of partnership should contribute to the well-being of a future marriage. It was also found that modern youth were

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tolerant of the diversity of manifestations of love in society, as they valued love as an existential need for the life of any person. The results obtained in the study regarding youth's perceptions of love and marriage can be used in counselling and psychotherapeutic practice by family psychologists and other professionals in the helping professions

**Keywords:** infatuation; romantic feelings; partner relationships; marital relationships; conditions of uncertainty

## Introduction

In conditions of socio-psychological uncertainty, the problem of studying youth's perceptions of love and marriage is particularly relevant. The complex and unstable realities of Ukrainian society in recent years have been characterised by significant changes in marriage and family processes. All families experience various difficulties, but especially young people who are just starting their life together in conditions of extreme general crisis in the country, which in psychological terms is accompanied by states of uncertainty, chronic anxiety for themselves and their loved ones, internal personal disharmony, etc. For young people who are just beginning to build close relationships and are considering marriage, there is a significant risk of distortion of marital and family ideas and processes at the very beginning of their development.

As noted by A. Matysiak & D. Vignoli (2024), over the past two decades, labour markets in post-industrial countries have undergone enormous transformations, significantly changing the conditions under which young people make family decisions and raise children. While these changes create new opportunities, they also give rise to risks that potentially contribute to uncertainty about the future and affect people's ability to earn money, care for family members and make long-term commitments. Economic uncertainty, the threat of unemployment or unstable employment, and financial difficulties lead to delays in childbearing and increase the risk of union and partnership breakdown. These effects are exacerbated when labour market deregulation occurs simultaneously with labour market dualisation, and

become more pronounced during periods of economic hardship, such as economic recessions, the COVID-19 pandemic, martial law in the country, etc.

Research by R. Guetto *et al.* (2021) shows that narratives about the future have a causal effect on marriage intentions: prolonged waiting before returning to pre-pandemic conditions has a negative impact on marriage intentions. On the other hand, the researchers emphasise that cohabitation seems more compatible with the uncertainties of the modern world. In their study, an important role in the process of family formation is assigned to the future (without taking into account more "traditional" factors), which are considered in scientific works on family life. In the Ukrainian language, there is a differentiation between the words "love" and "romantic love", so the perception and use of these concepts may differ in different cultures and social contexts. Researchers F. Yang & D. Dalsky (2025) explore the intercultural understanding of the words "love" and "romantic love". Researcher J. Carter (2022) defines the complex reality of love, studies its various dimensions, and examines the diverse social and cultural contexts in which it unfolds.

Psychology distinguishes between different types and approaches to explaining love: the biological approach; the psychodynamic approach; humanistic approach; cognitive approach), as researched by N. Mosol (2023), as well as different dimensions of love: quantitative and qualitative (its depth, humanity) – according to O. Tsilmak & V. Lefterov (2020). The nature of love is multifaceted, as people can feel love for partners, parents, siblings, relatives, friends, other people, pets, and

even God (Machin, 2022). Some researchers focus on romantic love, i.e., love felt for a partner in the context of a romantic relationship (Kowal *et al.*, 2024). Some studies aimed at exploring the relationship between participants' love and relationship satisfaction at different stages of a couple's interaction have shown that there is a close relationship between love and relationship satisfaction, as well as a relationship between types of love and relationship satisfaction, which differs at different stages of a relationship (Cassepp-Borges *et al.*, 2023).

Thus, preparation for marriage and family life has been and remains one of the important existential tasks in the ontogenesis of personality at the adolescent stage. Despite global trends characterised by the liberalisation of "adult" norms of sexual morality, the destruction of stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, and significant differences in the normative orientations of modern young men and women from the ideas of their parents and grandparents, it is worth noting the current realities in which young people in Ukraine live and develop. Young Ukrainians face many obstacles on the path to harmonious close relationships in the premarital period. The crisis and certain socio-psychological uncertainty in the functioning of Ukrainian society in one way or another affects the ability of young people to adequately understand and evaluate themselves and potential partners when psychological distortions of the congruence of self-awareness occur, which is mainly manifested through underestimating or overestimating oneself and others. In the current conditions of socio-psychological uncertainty, some important issues related to the value and content of young people's lives may be considered insignificant or irrelevant, or, conversely, the role of situational factors may be exaggerated, while aspects that youth would normally take into account (not in conditions of martial law and socio-psychological uncertainty) may be ignored. Such a contradictory socio-psychological situation of development provokes young people to make ill-considered decisions,

can cause the devaluation of close partnerships and other negative consequences for the personal development and self-determination of young men and women.

The aim of the study was to examine young people's attitudes towards love and marriage in the context of complex social transformations in Ukrainian society.

### Literature Review

According to S. Sassler & D. Lichter (2020), there have been unprecedented changes in the timing, duration, and sequence of intimate relationships occurring in cohabiting partners. This, in turn, has made the scientific study of traditional marriage in the modern world much more complex than in the past. The above authors review contemporary theory, empirical approaches, and demographic trends in cohabitation and marriage, focusing on the causes and consequences of transitioning from one union to another. They emphasise that the increase in extramarital cohabitation has overturned traditional theoretical models and approaches to measuring traditional marriage, complicating the issue but at the same time stimulating current research on the formation of family unions and their consequences for partners, children and society as a whole.

Some researchers have studied love during quarantine, namely, given that governments around the world have imposed strict social distancing and stay-at-home orders, which have significantly affected the amount of time couples spend together. In their study, researchers examined whether perceptions of changes in time spent with a partner were related to stress, and whether stress levels, in turn, predicted commitment to and satisfaction with the relationship, both in the short and long term. In addition, the impact of economic activity on family behaviour has become less gender-specific as women increasingly gain economic independence. Finally, it appears that highly educated workers and members of higher social classes are increasingly better placed to realise their fertility intentions than

their less educated counterparts and members of lower social classes (Derbyshire *et al.*, 2023). In addition, studies show that temporary workers are postponing starting a family. Researchers D. van Wijk *et al.* (2021) highlight whether this effect is related to lower income or to a stronger sense of job insecurity that accompanies temporary contracts.

As J. Carter (2022) notes, in the western world, the status of love is often used as a barometer of contemporary social issues: from concerns about the breakdown of the social structure with the rise in divorce rates in the 1950s to campaigns for equality and justice for same-sex marriage in the 1990s and 2000s, and more recently, to concerns about the commercialisation of love with the advent of dating apps. Social theory often presents romantic love as a reflection of modern man's fascination with aspects of contemporary life such as consumption, equality, or rationality. The researcher defines the complex reality of love, explores the emotional, rational, and social dimensions of love, as well as the various social and cultural contexts in which it exists. The scholar argues for a connection between love, marriage, and morality, understanding the latter as a key boundary for modern relationships. She views love as a reimagined morality that provides guiding principles for life and solves the problem of endless choice. Given the above, the problem of socio-psychological uncertainty and the development of close relationships in these conditions requires a thorough study of basic definitions, such as: uncertainty and its conditions, love, marriage, marital relationships.

Exploring uncertainty as a socio-psychological problem of personality, A. Kurova (2021) considers the psychological content of the category through its positive and negative aspects. Thus, she attributes to the negative aspects the problem with the anticipatory function of the psyche, which provokes an inability to predict the dynamics of a situation's development and a loss of control over one's life, and to the positive aspects the possibilities of multiple choices that an individual receives in conditions of uncertainty. And if take

into account the specifics of the social situation of modern youth, then quite favourable conditions for self-determination are created for them. In other words, the researcher considers uncertainty to be multifunctional: on the one hand, as an opportunity for personal development and self-realisation, and on the other, as a condition for getting stuck in individual or group cognitive dissonance, which makes it impossible to make decisions and find a way out of the situation, or even to want to look for such a way out. In other words, uncertainty depends on age, individual characteristics and cognitive properties of the personality, and a number of social factors. The APA (n.d.) characterises uncertainty as "a state or condition in which something (e.g., the probability of a certain outcome) is not precisely or reliably known" or "a lack of confidence or clarity in one's ideas, decisions, or intentions". Psychological uncertainty, in particular, is observed when a person perceives information as incomplete, missing, or vague, regardless of whether it is objectively uncertain.

Some researchers reveal a socio-psychological understanding of the relationship between the concept of uncertainty and conflicts between groups in a given society. They conceptualise uncertainty and the meaning and role of uncertainty in the context of understanding conflicts between groups (Zick & Sandal-Önal, 2023). The above-mentioned scholars point out that most studies focus primarily on the destructive consequences of overcoming uncertainty, as the main focus is on destructive conflict resolution. It focuses on intergroup conflicts characterised by incompatibility of interests, identities and values between two or more social groups; in simpler terms, conflicts in which one group tries to assert itself against another or more groups in order to gain power and influence.

Research shows that when groups experience uncertainty, they will try to make sense of the situation and will mostly view it as a threat that will lead to losses (Breakwell, 2021). Thus, conflict research has so far focused more on the motives of individuals within groups who seek

to dissolve uncertainty into certainty and security by separating themselves from other groups. Uncertainty is also described as being generated by contextual factors and challenging individuals' confidence in their views, beliefs, values, feelings, and behaviour (Hogg, 2007). Thus, this researcher's approach presents personal and situational uncertainty as interdependent, with the latter causing the former.

Situations of uncertainty are often accompanied by destructive emotional states, but such circumstances, according to A. Kurova (2021), can form the basis of a person's supra-situational activity, which is characterised by interest that stimulates imagination, mental and behavioural activity. A person has the opportunity to assess the positive aspects of a situation of uncertainty due to the need to find more solutions than is possible, due to the experience of positive emotions associated with the situation of novelty, challenge, drive, etc. Important factors influencing an individual's choice of behavioural strategy in a situation of uncertainty are their perception of the specifics of the situation, possible experience of overcoming similar circumstances, and, in a real situation, personal characteristics, etc. Thus, to a certain extent, complex and contradictory social conditions can differently influence the content of young people's perceptions of love and marriage.

In psychological science, there are a number of theoretical approaches to studying love that provide answers to questions about its nature and functions. The psychological phenomenon of love is studied by scientists from different angles. It is worth noting that in the Ukrainian language, there is a semantic distinction between the words "love" as a word with a broader meaning and "romantic love" as a passionate emotion or feeling. The word "love" comes from the old Indian root "lubh", which means "to desire" or "to strive for". In ancient languages related to modern European languages, this root acquired a meaning associated with emotional experiences, attachment, and strong desire. In different cultures and languages,

the concept of love has taken different forms, but the basic meaning of the concept is this: love is a feeling that expresses strong attachment to someone or something, fills existence with meaning, and is unique and unrepeatable for everyone. The semantics of the Ukrainian word "kohannia" is associated with experiencing strong passion, inspiration, and the desire to be with someone. This concept encompasses emotional dependence, attachment, and the need for closeness and intimacy (Mosol, 2023). Linguists emphasise that the word "kohannia" comes from the Proto-Slavic "kohaty" ("to care for, to look after"), which in turn is related to the Indo-European root *kos*, meaning "to comb, to stroke, to caress".

However, researchers F. Yang & D. Dalsky (2025) suggest that the exchange of linguistic knowledge (explicit semantic and implicit pragmatic) and cultural knowledge (explicit ethical and implicit emic) about Indigenous concepts of love through intercultural dialogue can liberate understandings of love that are "confined within the English language", from the perspective of Indigenous psychology. The authors propose an "Equivalent indigenous concept model" for intercultural understanding of love in Chinese (爱; *ai*) and Ukrainian (кохання; *kohannya*). The results of interpretative phenomenological analysis based on students' intercultural communication (conducted in English) indicate that at the semantic and ethical levels both 爱 and кохання represent deep emotions in romantic relationships. However, at the pragmatic and emic levels, 爱 functions as an emotional bond connecting the individual, family, and nation, with an emphasis on devotion and responsibility. In contrast, кохання primarily describes romantic love directed toward a romantic partner and emphasises its sacredness. The scope, historical roots, and expression of these concepts of love, as well as the dynamic and bittersweet nature of love and its relationship with marriage and family, are discussed from Chinese and Ukrainian sociocultural perspectives. These findings confirm that equivalent Indigenous concepts such as 爱 and кохання represent a universal

phenomenon (in this case, love), yet are likely expressed and experienced differently within specific cultural contexts (Yang & Dalsky, 2025).

Marriage as a social institution constitutes a fundamental unit of society and plays an important role in shaping culture, health, and individual well-being. Various forms of marriage can be observed, as well as conscious rejection of marriage by some individuals. In certain sociocultural contexts, the idea of extramarital relationships grounded in love is promoted. From a psychological perspective, however, love (romantic love) within the context of marriage remains of particular interest, as most people describe it as an elevated and pleasant feeling without which life is difficult to imagine. At the same time, the combination of marriage and love has long provoked debate in academic discourse: can marriage and love be compatible, or does marriage “destroy” romantic love? (Shumchuk, 2024). According to the researcher, there are three or even four key perspectives proposed by different thinkers that could ensure the presence of love in marriage: love exists in marriage when partners freely choose each other; love is possible and manifests only outside marriage; love is a personal choice that requires continuous effort and development. Although the etymology of the words “love” and “romantic love” points to their origins and primary meanings, it is important to note that the perception and use of these concepts may vary across cultures and social contexts. Moreover, each individual may possess a personal understanding and interpretation of love and romantic love, shaped by life experience, values, and beliefs.

In psychology, there are different types and approaches to explaining “love”. The main approaches include: the biological approach (love as a result of biological processes and evolutionary adaptation); the psychodynamic approach (love is considered in the context of unknown and unconscious forces and conflicts acting in the human psyche); the humanistic approach (love as a powerful spiritual experience that contributes to personal growth and development, as a

manifestation of the highest values, empathy, care and support); cognitive approach (love is viewed as a constructive and active interpretation of one’s partner and relationship); socio-psychological approach (love is studied in the context of social interaction and cultural perceptions, examining the role of social norms, expectations and interaction in the development of relationships) (Mosol, 2023).

Romantic love is usually divided into at least two subtypes: passionate love, which is felt very intensely and is most often experienced at the beginning of a romantic relationship, and companionate love, which is felt less intensely and is most often experienced in the later stages of a relationship. Romantic love, in their interpretation, is a universal experience that transcends cultural boundaries and time constraints. If romantic love is generally perceived as a force that promotes commitment between long-term partners, the above-mentioned researchers expected that people who are likely to suffer greater losses from the breakdown of their relationships, including those with lower socioeconomic status, those with many children, and women, would place more value on romantic love than people with higher status, those with fewer children, and men. The study confirmed these predictions. In addition, it was found that individuals from countries with higher (compared to lower) human development indices placed greater value on romantic love, suggesting that modernisation may influence the valuation of romantic love. On average, participants around the world were unwilling to enter into long-term romantic relationships without love, highlighting the universal importance of romantic love (Kowal *et al.*, 2024).

There is broad consensus in the literature on romantic relationships about the importance of both love and relationship satisfaction for relationship stability and longevity. For example, greater relationship dissatisfaction (or, conversely, lower satisfaction) is associated with an increased propensity for extramarital affairs. It is important to note that marital status is impor-

tant for relationship satisfaction. Married couples tend to be more satisfied with their relationships than unmarried cohabitants or couples who have remarried. More specifically, the transition to marriage is a special period that increases relationship satisfaction. Couples who date report greater relationship satisfaction and are more likely to marry.

Certain studies aimed at examining the relationship between participants' romantic love and relationship satisfaction at different stages of a couple's interaction have confirmed that there is a close relationship between romantic love (the constructs that comprise it: intimacy, passion, devotion, etc.) and relationship satisfaction, as well as a connection between types of romantic love and relationship satisfaction, which differs at different stages of a relationship. Romantic love is a guaranteed predictor of relationship satisfaction. The results of the study demonstrated the strength of this connection. Thus, romantic love predicted more than 50% of the variance in relationship satisfaction in stable relationships and more than 30% in any other sample, such as unrequited relationships or casual flings (Cassepp-Borges *et al.*, 2023).

Research by G. Yoo & S. Joo (2022) also found that love and its components are positively associated with marital satisfaction. The researchers found gender differences, with women showing a stronger link between perceived intimacy and marital satisfaction than men. Men reported higher perceptions of love and marital satisfaction than women. According to research, approximately one-third of all births are to unmarried parents, and unmarried cohabitation has evolved from a socially stigmatised practice to a normal stage of adult life (more than half of all American marriages now begin as cohabitation). Many of the same patterns are observed in Europe, although there are fewer divorces there (Hull *et al.*, 2010). Thus, the issue of love, its nature, its connection with relationship satisfaction at different stages of partner interaction, including the relationship between love and marriage, is relevant.

Since the key concepts of the study are romantic love and marriage, it is also worth interpreting the concept of marriage. The word "marriage" comes from the old slavic "slyub" – a solemn promise, and "slyubytys" means to agree.

Article 21 of the Family Code of Ukraine No. 2947-III (2025) defines the concept of marriage as follows:

"1. Marriage is a family union between a woman and a man, registered with the state civil registry office.

2. Living together as a family without marriage does not give rise to the rights and obligations of spouses".

In summary, it can be said that romantic love and satisfaction with a relationship are interrelated factors that significantly influence the stability and duration of romantic relationships. The level of satisfaction increases during the transition to more formal forms of cohabitation, in particular marriage, which is considered in Ukrainian law as an officially registered union between a woman and a man. Thus, romantic love is not only the emotional but also the psychological basis of marital happiness, and marriage is the social and legal form of its realisation.

## Materials and Methods

The aim of the empirical study was to determine the psychological characteristics of contemporary Ukrainian youth's perceptions of love, romance, and marriage in conditions of socio-psychological uncertainty. The study involved 142 higher education students from two higher education institutions in Kyiv: Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University and the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine. Since the subject of the study was the psychological characteristics of youth's perception and understanding of such complex socio-psychological phenomena of human life as love, romance and marriage, and in order to explain them, respondents had to rely on individual personality traits in such personal spheres as self-awareness, motivational and value orientations, cognitive and

emotional-sensory complexity, etc., the sample was formed exclusively on the basis of the principle of voluntary informed consent of the study participants, which contributed to obtaining more objective empirical data. Before the start of the study, respondents were informed about its purpose and the principle of confidentiality through the anonymity of their answers, and gave their voluntary informed consent to participate in the survey. Throughout the study, the ethical principles and provisions of the American Sociological Association Code of Ethics (2018) were adhered to.

Since the target audience of the empirical study is young people, the key criterion for selecting study participants was the age range of respondents – from 17 to 35 years old, but a significant part (33.8%) is the 18-year-old age group. The sample consisted of 81.7% female and 18.3% male respondents. The majors of the surveyed students are as follows: Philology, Psychology, Physical Education and Sports. The main method of empirical research was a questionnaire in the form of a self-assessment with elements of introspection (self-observation) of respondents in a remote format. When developing the content of the questionnaire, the author adhered to the basic requirements for the psychodiagnostic component of such a tool, namely: the respondents' needs and motivations and their attitude to the survey (a priori, the study was to involve individuals with adequate motivation for the study conditions and an understanding of the transparency of its overall results), which made it possible to formulate direct and predominantly open-ended questions in the questionnaire; the level of mastery of the respondents' experience, taking into account which the author's questionnaire is of a declarative nature and, accordingly, provides for one diagnostic cross-section for each respondent; restrictions on the number of questions (the main content of the questionnaire consists of 15 open and closed questions, grouped into three blocks, according to ideas about love, infatuation, and marriage). In terms of the form of implementation of the respondents' activities during the survey,

the questionnaire is a verbal research method. Thus, the author's questionnaire proposed to the respondents simultaneously contains characteristics of a cross-sectional, direct, descriptive, verbal empirical study.

At the stage of collecting empirical information, which lasted from April to May 2025, a written survey method was used via Google Forms (the author developed the content). At the data processing stage, methods of mathematical-statistical (quantitative) and qualitative analysis were used: average values, percentage ratios, ranking on the IBM SPSS Statistics platform (version 29). At the final stage of the study, the obtained diagnostic data were interpreted and summarised.

## Results and Discussion

In order to determine the value of love and marriage in the current life activity of contemporary youth, respondents were asked to assess their present relevance using a six-point scale ranging from 0 points (completely irrelevant) to 5 points (very relevant). According to the survey results, almost 60% of the surveyed young people rated the relevance of love in their lives at the present time as high (4-5 points). However, only 21% of participants assessed the current relevance of issues related to marriage for themselves as high (also 4-5 points). At the same time, nearly 16% of young people indicated a low or very low value of feelings of love and romantic love in the present, while 62% of respondents emphasised the extremely low relevance of starting a family and entering into marriage at this stage of their lives. These findings regarding the high value of love and romantic love for contemporary Ukrainian youth may be explained by the inherent human need, at any age, to love and to feel loved by others. At the same time, it may be assumed that the low inclination of contemporary youth to create their own families through formal marriage is a consequence of current social conditions in Ukraine, which are characterised by persistent situations of socio-psychological uncertainty.

For the purposes of the study, it was important to determine how deeply young people perceive, conceptualise, and understand the cognition of “love”, as well as the extent to which they psychologically differentiate between the feelings of love and infatuation. When defining love, the surveyed young people offered a wide range of interpretations, the most common of which was “a feeling of emotional attachment to another person that combines care, commitment, respect, support, trust, and acceptance”. Frequently mentioned characteristics of love also included confidence in another person, shared traits and values, and feelings of safety, calmness, tenderness, and mutual satisfaction of needs. In addition to the emotional-affective and moral-ethical components of love, respondents pointed to the importance of social and activity-based components, such as the significance of cooperation, joint development of the couple, and striving to achieve shared goals. Some participants interpreted love in more concrete terms, referring to it as “my partner” or “family”, or describing it simply as “rest”, “friendship”, “partnership”, “harmony”, “chemistry”, “sincere feelings”, “an addition to life”, or “the meaning of life”, among others. It should be noted that those respondents who rated the relevance of love and romantic love in their lives as high tended to provide more elaborate and profound interpretations of love, emphasising its value for them both in the present and necessarily in the future, and highlighting not only their own emotional attachment to a partner, but also mutual understanding, mutual respect, an almost transcendental sense of unity, a shared desire to support one another, personal development, mutual acceptance, and the joint construction of a shared future.

When comparing love and infatuation, the majority of the surveyed young people demonstrated a good understanding of the fundamental psychological characteristics of love as a higher feeling, pointing to its depth, longer duration and stability, strength, and seriousness. Many respondents also noted that love is characterised

by awareness, maturity, unconditional acceptance of a partner, and manifestations of responsibility, commitment, confidence, trust, and care in relation to the partner. It is noteworthy that some participants emphasised the importance of mutuality as a characteristic of love, which, in their view, is absent in infatuation. Some respondents also indicated that love must withstand the test of time, during which a couple jointly overcomes difficulties, thereby forming a conscious unity and readiness of two mentally healthy and mature individuals to work on their relationship. In addition, certain respondents expressed views linking love with marriage, arguing that love should lead to the creation of a family.

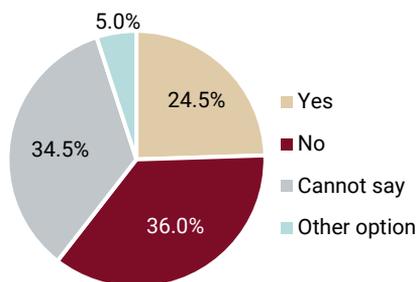
Respondents attributed the following characteristics to infatuation: idealisation of partners towards one another, heightened emotionality, transience, temporariness, situationality, lack of control, and its role as a first stage leading towards love. At the same time, participants quite frequently argued that infatuation is more strongly associated with liking another person's physical appearance, whereas love implies acceptance of another person with all their strengths and weaknesses. Infatuation was described not as a feeling but as an emotional state, primarily determined by biochemical and hormonal reactions, which can be rather intense and “explosive” at the beginning of a relationship. In contrast, love was described as a feeling shaped by biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors.

Some respondents noted that infatuation is characterised by uncertainty (in contrast to love) and by the predominance of expectations (as opposed to the faith inherent in love). One participant described this distinction as follows: “Infatuation is mainly an emotional outburst, fascination, and idealisation of a person; it often arises suddenly, is accompanied by strong physical attraction and romantic dreams, but may be short-lived. Love is a deeper and more mature feeling; it develops over time and is based on mutual respect and trust. Love is the choice to stay close even when emotions fade and life presents

challenges". Some respondents also pointed out that infatuation may occur in relation to inanimate objects (for example, being infatuated with music), whereas love can be directed only towards a person. There were also opinions suggesting that infatuation and love are identical concepts. Thus, the majority of contemporary youth make a considerable effort to understand higher human feelings such as love and romantic love, emphasising their enduring value in the life of any individual. At the same time, young people highlight not only the emotional-affective component of love but, while recognising its moral-ethical dimension, also emphasise the joint-activity aspect of partner relationships within love.

The study also sought to identify respondents' emotional experiences related to love, romantic love, and infatuation. In response to the question "Have you experienced or are you currently experiencing the feeling of love?", 64% of the surveyed young people answered affirmatively, 21% responded "no", and 14% answered "cannot say". One respondent noted loving oneself. Subsequent research questions empirically examined issues related to social stereotypes and their influence on young people's representations of love and romantic love. Particularly informative were young people's responses to the question of whether they believe in love "at first sight" (Fig. 1).

Do you believe in love "at first sight"?

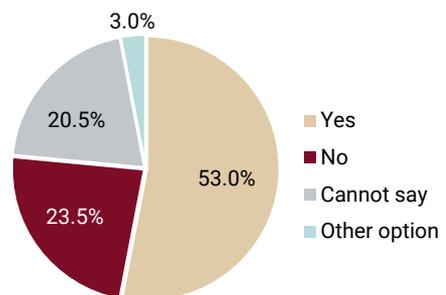


**Figure 1.** Distribution of young people's responses to the question "Do you believe in love at first sight?"

Source: developed by the authors

As can be seen in Figure 1, 36% of respondents pursuing higher education answered "no", 24.5% answered "yes", and 34.5% of young people had doubts. During the survey, respondents had the opportunity to comment on and explain their answers, including clarifications such as: they believe, but not in love, rather in sympathy, infatuation "at first sight" (5% of respondents). The next question concerned young people's belief in the theory of the existence of a "soulmate"; the results are presented in Figure 2.

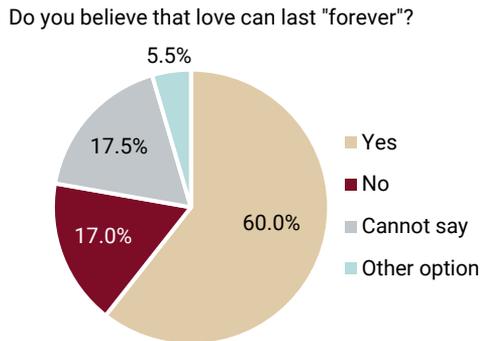
Do you believe in the theory of the existence of a "soulmate"?



**Figure 2.** Distribution of young people's responses to the question "Do you believe in the theory of the existence of a "soulmate"?"

Source: developed by the authors

Thus, the majority of the surveyed young people (53%) believe in the theory of the existence of a "soulmate"; 23.5% of respondents stated that they do not believe in the existence of a "soulmate", while 20.5% of those surveyed were unable to provide a definite answer to this question. As for alternative response options, the following were noted: "belief in the existence of multiple soulmates"; "belief in the existence of a "kindred spirit" rather than a soulmate"; "belief in the meeting of two complete individuals"; and "lack of familiarity with this theory". In response to the question "Do you believe that love can last "forever"?", respondents' answers are presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Distribution of young people's responses to the question "Do you believe that love can last "forever"?"

**Source:** developed by the authors

As shown in Figure 3, the majority of respondents (60%) believe in the eternity (long-term nature) of love; 17% of respondents stated unequivocally that they do not believe in this, while 17.5% of young people were unable to answer this question. In the proposed open-ended response options, participants answered as follows: "unlikely, but exceptions are possible"; "it all depends on the individual level"; two respondents noted that love can last "forever" if a couple works on their relationship and continually nurtures it. Thus, contemporary youth demonstrate a predominantly rational approach (more than 70% of respondents) to feelings of love/romantic love, recognising that they require joint, partner-based, in-depth psychological work, alongside an irrational approach (around 60% of those surveyed), according to which "eternal love" and a "soulmate" exist and one simply has to be fortunate enough to encounter them, simultaneously.

The next research questions aimed to clarify young people's awareness and understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying higher human feelings – love and romantic love. In response to the question "Why, in your opinion, do people fall in love with each other?", participants were able to choose two answer options and propose their own. The most frequently selected answer was that people fall in love with each other

because they have "similar personality traits, beliefs, and value orientations" (almost 77% of respondents chose this option). Approximately 51% of participants believe that people who complement each other fall in love. About 39% selected the option "having shared interests", while 35% chose "physical attractiveness". Nearly 13% of respondents believe that people fall in love because a partner resembles one's mother or father. Around 8% selected the option that "opposites attract", and 7% of participants indicated that infatuation is facilitated by spatial factors, such as "living nearby" or "studying together/being friends".

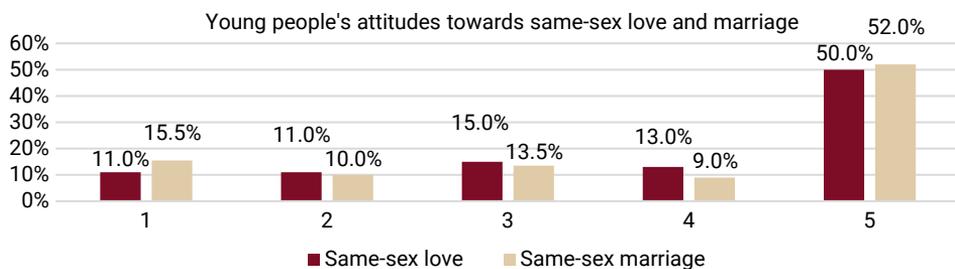
Subsequently, young people's representations regarding the duration of partner relationships preceding marriage were examined. The most optimal period for partners to get to know each other before entering into marriage, according to the majority of respondents (36.5%), is up to three years; 24.6% considered up to two years optimal; 24.5% indicated more than three years; 8.5% selected up to one year; and 2% up to six months. The remaining responses indicate that respondents found it difficult to determine a specific duration, taking into account the individual differences in each couple's interaction. Some respondents noted that even ten years may be insufficient for partners to fully get to know each other, while others stated that "those who are truly in love do not need time", or that "two years of cohabitation are necessary". Participants were also asked to assess the acceptability of marriage without love on a five-point scale, where 1 indicated completely unacceptable and 5 fully acceptable. In their responses, more than 68% of respondents selected levels 1-2, with 47% of this group rating such a marriage as completely unacceptable (1).

Thus, contemporary Ukrainian youth predominantly (more than 85% of respondents) believe that a successful future marriage should be preceded by a sufficiently long period (at least two years) of partner relationships, during which partners can better understand and comprehend each other's individual and personal characteristics, preferences, aspirations, and values. The

priority placed on a prolonged pre-marital period among contemporary youth may be explained by society's tolerant attitude towards premarital cohabitation, as well as by young people's desire to make a more conscious choice of a marital partner under conditions of socio-psychological uncertainty. In addition, the majority of contemporary youth (more than 68% of respondents) consider it unacceptable for themselves and for others to enter into marriage for reasons other than mutual love, which indirectly suggests that love represents one of their highest values.

Furthermore, the study empirically examined the characteristics of young people's representations of difficulties in partner relationships associated with love. In response to the question "What main problems, in your view, do people

in love most often encounter?", respondents could select two answer options or propose their own. According to participants, the most common problem was the inability to listen to and hear one another (81%), followed by lack of trust and jealousy (almost 49%), inability of a partner to compromise (34%), idealisation of a partner (27%), egocentrism and excessive focus on oneself and one's own problems (20%), negative influence of friends or family (13%), excessive emotionality (12%), and others. Thus, the majority of problems identified by young respondents are associated with difficulties in communicative and emotional interaction within the couple. Participants were also asked to express their attitudes towards same-sex love and marriage, the results of which are presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Young people's attitudes towards same-sex love and marriage

**Note:** attitudes towards same-sex love and marriage were assessed on a five-point scale: 1 – extremely negative; 2 – predominantly negative; 3 – neutral; 4 – predominantly positive; 5 – fully positive

**Source:** developed by the authors

Young people's attitudes towards same-sex love and marriage were assessed using a five-point scale, where 1 indicated an extremely negative attitude and 5 a fully positive attitude. The results were as follows: 50% of young people demonstrated an entirely positive attitude towards same-sex love; almost 13% of respondents expressed a generally positive attitude, and approximately 15% demonstrated an intermediate (neutral) attitude. Young people's assessment of their attitudes towards same-sex marriage revealed similar tendencies, although with a slightly higher proportion of respondents holding an extremely negative attitude towards this form of

marital relationship (15.5% of respondents expressed an extremely negative attitude towards same-sex marriage, compared with 11% of respondents for whom same-sex love was considered completely unacceptable). At the same time, the proportion of respondents with a predominantly positive attitude towards same-sex marriage and same-sex love was approximately the same (61% and 63% of respondents, respectively). Thus, it may be assumed that contemporary youth perceive the diversity of manifestations of love in society more tolerantly than other generations and value love and romantic love in all their forms as an existential need of human life

activity. A more stable awareness among contemporary youth of love as a value in its diversity may also be conditioned by situations of social uncertainty and the psychological states that accompany prolonged uncertainty.

Subsequently, young people's representations of the psychological characteristics of an ideal potential marital partner were examined. The question "What is your ideal partner for a potential marriage?" allowed respondents to choose three answer options and propose their own. The option receiving the highest number of selections (70%) was "possesses personality traits and value orientations that I share"; 64% selected "loves me"; 37% indicated "has a sense of humour"; 36% chose "has high potential and good prospects"; 30% selected "has a stable financial income"; 27% indicated "has an attractive appearance"; and 25% chose "leads a healthy lifestyle and has no harmful habits", among others. Almost 11% of respondents considered the availability of one's own housing to be an important argument when evaluating a partner as ideal for marriage. The same proportion (11%) believed that the potential partner's well-functioning family background is also an important condition for creating one's own family. Nine per cent of participants noted that the presence of, or commitment to, high-quality education on the part of a future husband or wife should be a priority when deciding to enter into marriage. Nearly 8% responded that a potential marital partner should have a prestigious job and high social status. Overall, contemporary youth, when choosing a marital partner, predominantly orient themselves towards shared worldview values, among which love and romantic love occupy a central position, along with personal and professional development.

The results obtained in this study are partially reflected in existing scholarly research, although each work focuses on specific aspects of the issue. In particular, studies by Z. Sonkaya & N. Öcal (2024) examine young people's attitudes towards marriage and societal gender roles based on selected socio-demographic variables. The

average age of participants in their study was  $20.53 \pm 1.96$  years, of whom 67.9% were women and 32.1% were men. The findings indicate that young people demonstrate high levels of positive marital attitudes and openness to marriage. Participants' views on marriage, the distribution of power between spouses, and domestic violence suggest a tendency towards a more traditional understanding of marriage.

The scientific research of O. Batsylyeva *et al.* (2019) is aimed at studying the readiness of young people for marriage, namely, an empirical study of the psychological aspects of the readiness for marriage of modern youth (the average age of the subjects was 20-23 years, of which 60 were male and 52 were female). The researchers found that at the time of the study, the young people were not married, but 27 participants were in long-term relationships with their partners (more than 1 year). The results of the study showed that most of the respondents were marriage-oriented, used constructive types of behaviour in conflict situations, and that family life was of paramount importance in their value system. Scientists have determined that the leading motives for marriage for most young people are love between partners and financial security. Also, most of the subjects are oriented towards premarital sexual relations and attach great importance to sexual relations in married life. Researchers have found that a significant proportion of respondents with low levels of empathy do not have a positive attitude towards having children; according to most of them, parenting is not a priority.

Researchers T. Denysovets *et al.* (2022) and L. Magdysyuk *et al.* (2024) also conducted a psychological analysis of the readiness of modern youth for married life (the study involved 50 boys and 50 girls aged 16 to 18, 82% of whom have complete families, and 18% of whom live in incomplete families). Based on the analysis of the results, it was found that the vast majority of respondents have a high level of readiness for marriage. At the same time, it should be taken into account that marital orientations are revealed in

the desire of young people to build harmonious partnerships and create strong, happy families, whose members will always be ready to compromise and solve problems constructively.

The study by I. Lukšik & J. Šrol (2022) aimed to examine young people's individual perceptions of love (participants aged 18 to 35, of whom 70.1% were women and 29.9% were men). The researchers noted various manifestations of love: positive, harmonious and idealistic descriptions of love ("love conquers all", "love gives meaning to life"), as well as more physical, visceral and negative aspects of love ("love is a basic instinct", "love is an addiction"). According to the above-mentioned scientists, love is the most common phenomenon at the individual, social and cultural levels. A person's knowledge of love comes from both individual personal experience and social and cultural models that depict the nature of love in a particular era. The researchers emphasise that the scale of individual perceptions of love is based on the fact that perceptions of love are created at the point where personality intersects with culture. Thus, the psychometric parameters of the scale of individual beliefs about love developed by them were tested taking into account cultural resources, religious status, gender, and characteristics of multiple partner relationships. The results showed that there are five factors of individual perceptions of love: 1) biological and egocentric love, 2) spiritual love, 3) physical love, devotion, search and development, 4) the power and positive benefits of love, and 5) the downside of love.

Taking into account existing research, it is possible to note a significant number of scientific works aimed at studying the psychological readiness of youth for marriage and family life, as well as those focused on measuring individual attitudes, feelings, manifestations, and behaviour related to love. However, the study of the psychological characteristics of contemporary Ukrainian youth's perceptions of love and marriage in conditions of socio-psychological uncertainty is not sufficiently represented in the studies reviewed. However, the research results obtained are

confirmed by existing data that young people are focused on building harmonious partnerships, have differentiated ideas about love and romance, and distinguish between different dimensions of love: quantitative (its strength, passion, intensity) and qualitative (its depth, humanity). It is also worth noting the predominance of a humanistic approach in youth's interpretation of love. The priority of a long-term period of close relationships before marriage for modern youth is confirmed by the results of the study, but unlike the studies by O. Batsylyeva *et al.* (2019), the empirical study does not focus specifically on sexual relationships. In addition, it has been confirmed that the majority of modern youth consider it unacceptable for themselves and others to marry for reasons other than mutual love, which, indirectly, can be assumed to be one of the highest values for them.

## Conclusions

Thus, for modern youth in conditions of socio-psychological uncertainty, love and romance are worldview values of present and future life. At the same time, in such conditions of uncertainty, the values of starting a family and getting married are insignificant for modern youth. At the same time, modern young people have highly differentiated ideas about love and romance, emphasising such fundamental psychological characteristics of love as the highest human emotion, its depth, duration, stability, strength, seriousness, awareness, maturity, unconditional acceptance of a partner, responsibility, devotion, confidence, trust, care in relationships, etc. In addition, young people imagine and associate love with mutual understanding between partners, mutual respect, a sense of unity, a shared desire to support each other, personal development, acceptance of each other, building a future together, etc. Thus, in their ideas about love, modern young people emphasise both its emotional and sensual components and its moral and ethical components, as well as the joint activity aspect of partnership in love. At the same time, modern young people show duality in their understanding and attitude towards love:

through a rational approach to feelings of love, realising that they require joint deep psychological work by partners, and an irrational approach, according to which personal happiness requires only meeting “eternal love” or a “soulmate” for personal happiness. However, most contemporary youth clearly understand that the psychological basis of love and infatuation is the compatibility of personal qualities, similar beliefs and value orientations between partners. In the minds of youth, the well-being of a future marriage should be facilitated by a long period of partnership, during which partners get to know and understand each other’s individual personality traits, preferences, values, etc. better. The importance of long-term premarital relationships for modern youth may be due not only to society’s tolerant attitude towards partners living together before marriage, but also to young people’s desire to make a more informed choice of marriage partner in conditions of socio-psychological uncertainty.

Modern youth are tolerant of the diversity of manifestations of love in society, as they value

love as an existential need for the life of any person, and when choosing a marriage partner, they are mostly guided by shared worldview values, among which love and romance occupy a leading place. The following definitions appear promising: age, in particular the stages of early, middle and late adulthood, and gender differences in the perceptions of modern individuals regarding the essential content of such socio-psychological phenomena as love, mutual affection in partnership and marital relationships, etc., as well as an in-depth content analysis of the perceptions of modern youth regarding love and marriage in dynamics.

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None.

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## Психологічний аспект уявлень молоді про кохання і шлюб в умовах соціально-психологічної невизначеності

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**Анотація.** В умовах складних і нестабільних реалій українського суспільства останніх років спостерігались суттєві зміни в шлюбно-сімейних процесах, а тому проблема психологічних засад і особливостей розвитку уявлень сучасної молоді про кохання і шлюб є актуальною й такою, що потребує ґрунтовного дослідження. Мета роботи полягала у визначенні психологічних особливостей уявлень сучасної української молоді щодо любові, кохання та шлюбу в умовах соціально-психологічної невизначеності. Основними методами дослідження стали метод письмового опитування засобом Google-форми та методи кількісного і якісного аналізу. Отримані результати засвідчили, що для сучасної молоді в умовах соціально-психологічної невизначеності любов і кохання є світоглядними цінностями теперішнього та майбутнього життя. Щодо цінностей створення сім'ї й укладання шлюбу, то для сучасної молоді вони виявилися несуттєвими. В опитаних молодих людей виявлено високо диференційовані уявлення про любов і кохання, в яких робиться наголос на таких засадничих психологічних характеристиках кохання як вищого почуття людини: глибина, довготривалість, стабільність, сила, усвідомленість, безумовне прийняття партнера, відповідальність, відданість, довіра, турбота у ставленні тощо. У своїх уявленнях про кохання сучасна молодь відзначила його емоційно-почуттєву та морально-етичну складову, а також акцентувала на спільно-діяльнісному аспекті партнерських стосунків у коханні. Водночас, сучасна молодь виявила дуальність у розумінні та ставленні до кохання, виявляючи, з одного боку, раціональний підхід до почуттів любові/кохання, з іншого, – ірраціональний підхід. В уявленнях молоді благополуччю майбутнього шлюбного союзу мав сприяти довготривалий період партнерських стосунків. Також виявлено, що сучасна молодь була толерантною до різноманітності проявів кохання у суспільстві, оскільки цінувала любов як екзистенціальну потребу життєдіяльності будь-якої людини. Отримані у дослідженні результати щодо уявлень молоді про кохання і шлюб можна використовувати у консультативній і психотерапевтичній практиці сімейними психологами й іншими фахівцями допомагаючих професій

**Ключові слова:** закоханість; романтичні почуття; партнерські взаємини; шлюбні стосунки; умови невизначеності