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From Joint to Nuclear Family: Sociological Dimensions of the Decline of Joint Families and Rise of Nuclear Families in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Traditional joint family systems have long been regarded as cornerstone of Pakistani society which ensure collective living, intergenerational support and strong kinship ties. However, a gradual transition from joint to nuclear families have been witnessed in recent decades influenced by socio-economic, cultural and urbanization trends. Present research investigates the sociological dimensions of this transformation by examining its underlying causes and consequences in Faisalabad, Pakistan. Employing a mixed-method approach, the data was collected through structured survey of households with in-depth interviews to capture personal experiences and perceptions of family restructuring. Findings of the study reflect that economic pressures, women's increasing participation in education and employment, rural-to-urban migration and rising individualism are the key factors driving the shift toward nuclear families. This study also explores the implications of this transition including weakened kinship bonds, shifting gender roles, reduced intergenerational support and challenges in social care for children and the elderly. The research provides insights into how modernization, urbanization and globalization are redesigning family dynamics in Faisalabad and more broadly in Pakistan by situating these changes within a broader sociological framework.

Keywords: Joint family, Nuclear family, Urbanization, Modernization, Kinship, Pakistan, Faisalabad, Social consequences, Family Dynamics.

INTRODUCTION:

The institution of family remains one of the most fundamental social institutions designing values, roles and responsibilities within the society (Parsons & Bales, 1955). Joint family systems in Pakistan have historically been dominant ensuring shared resources, collective decision-making and intergenerational support (Qureshi, 2018; Ahmad & Batool, 2019) and this system provided economic cooperation, emotional security and a safety net for both the children and the elderly (Ali & Ahmad, 2019; Hassan & Sultana, 2021). Globalization, urbanization and modernization are contributing to significant transitions however in family structure (Shah, 2020; Hussain, 2021). Rise of nuclear family systems are particularly evident in urban and industrial regions such as



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Faisalabad where economic pressure, rural-to-urban migration and increased participation of females in education and employment are reconstructing household dynamics (Farooq & Javed, 2020; Kaur, 2020; Kamal & Qamar, 2021) encouraging smaller, independent family units that emphasize privacy, mobility and economic autonomy (Chaudhry, 2019; Iqbal, 2022). The nuclear families may offer flexibility and independence, the decay of joint family has also resulted in weakened kinship ties, reduced intergenerational care and challenges in social cohesion (Anwar & Yasmin, 2021; Jahan & Hussain, 2022).

Understanding these sociological transitions are critical as these trends have far-reaching consequences for gender roles, childcare, elderly care and socialization patterns in Pakistan (Sultana, 2019; Imran, 2021). This article explores the causes and consequences of the transition from joint to nuclear families in Faisalabad situating the findings within broader sociological theories of modernization, social change and family transformation (Rashid, 2020; Malik & Khan, 2022).

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY:

Change from joint to nuclear family systems is one of the most important social changes happening in contemporary Pakistani society. While joint family system has traditionally provided economic cooperation, social security and intergenerational support, the fast urbanization, industrial growth and shifting cultural values have accelerated rise of nuclear household especially in urban areas like Faisalabad. This shift has far-reaching impact for kinship relation, childcare, elderly support and gender roles, yet it remains an underexplored area in research within Pakistan. This study aims to analyze the underlying cause of this transition and its social implications and the rationale lies in understanding how these structural changes in family system affect broader social cohesion, cultural continuity and community life offering insights that can inform social policy and family welfare initiatives.

OBJECTIVES:

To examine the socio-economic and demographic attributes of respondents

To investigate the social consequences of this shift to kinship ties, gender roles, childcare and elderly care.

To dig out the perceptions of families regarding the advantages and challenges of shifting from joint to nuclear households

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Joint family systems have long been considered the cornerstone of South Asian societies ensuring social cohesion, interdependence and collective welfare (Parsons & Bales, 1955; Qureshi, 2018) and this system traditionally functioned as a support network where resources were pooled, decision-making was collective and intergenerational responsibilities were shared (Ahmad & Batool, 2019). Researchers argue that these structures not only provided economic stability but also ensured strong kinship ties, socialization of children, and care for the elderly (Ali & Ahmad, 2019; Sultana, 2019). Various studies reflect that modernization, industrialization and urbanization have triggered the decline of joint families (Shah, 2020; Hussain, 2021). The rural-to-urban migration, rise of consumer culture and participation of females in higher education and employment have significantly changed family preferences (Kaur, 2020; Kamal & Qamar, 2021) and now the nuclear family is more common in urban areas such as Faisalabad which offer greater privacy, mobility and independence to younger



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generations (Farooq & Javed, 2020; Iqbal, 2022). It is also noted that industrial cities intensify this trend by reconstructing household economies and living arrangements (Chaudhry, 2019; Rashid, 2020).

The outcome of this change is deeply debated. The nuclear family may enhance autonomy and reduce household conflicts, it also weakens kinship solidarity, reduces intergenerational care and leaves children and the elderly more vulnerable (Anwar & Yasmin, 2021; Jahan & Hussain, 2022). The researchers stress that the transitions in family structures have broader implications for gender roles, socialization and community cohesion in Pakistan (Imran, 2021; Malik & Khan, 2022) and the existing literature emphasizes the need to analyze this transformation at the city level making Faisalabad a significant case for sociological inquiry.

METHODOLOGY:

Present research was conducted in Faisalabad district which includes Faisalabad city and its three main tehsils: (Jaranwala, Samundari & Tandlianwala). This district was selected due to its rapid industrial growth, urban expansion and increasing trends of rural-to-urban migration making it a suitable case for exploring changes in family structures. The mixed-method approach was used to find out both the causes and consequences of the transition from joint to nuclear families. The sample size of the study consisted of 200 households (50 from each area) selected by using purposive sampling to ensure representation of both joint and nuclear families across different socio-economic groups. The questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data on demographic, economic and cultural factors influencing family change while 15 interviews were conducted with family members to get deeper insights into lived experiences and perceptions. The data were analyzed using SPSS to identify patterns and correlations while qualitative responses were subjected to thematic analysis to reflect recurring themes such as kinship ties, gender roles and intergenerational support.

Study Area	Type of Area	Sample Size (Households)	Sampling Technique
Faisalabad City	Urban/Industrial	50	Purposive Sampling
Jaranwala	Semi-Urban/Rural	50	Purposive Sampling
Samundari	Semi-Urban/Rural	50	Purposive Sampling
Tandlianwala	Semi-Urban/Rural	50	Purposive Sampling
Total		200	

*Sample Distribution

RESULTS & DISCUSSION:

Table No. 1: Demographic Attributes of respondents (N = 200)

Variable	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	120	60.0
	Female	80	40.0
Age Groups	20–30 years	45	22.5
	31–40 years	70	35.0
	41–50 years	55	27.5



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	51 years & above	30	15.0
Education Level	No formal education	28	14.0
	Primary–Matriculation	52	26.0
	Intermediate–Bachelor’s	78	39.0
	Master’s & above	42	21.0
Occupation	Labor/Skilled worker	60	30.0
	Business/Self-employed	40	20.0
	Government/Private job	55	27.5
	Housewives	45	22.5
Monthly Income	Less than 30,000 PKR	58	29.0
	30,001–60,000 PKR	82	41.0
	60,001–100,000 PKR	40	20.0
	Above 100,000 PKR	20	10.0

The above table shows the socio-demographic profile of respondents. It highlights important variations across gender, age, education, occupation and income. Almost 60% respondents were male and 40% were female. It indicates a male-dominated response pattern which is consistent with South Asian household surveys where men represent families in research. 40% females’ representation also ensures females perspectives are adequately included. Largest portion of respondents (35%) were in the age group of 31–40 years which is followed by 27.5% in the 41–50 years range. 22.5% belonged to 20–30-year group while 15% were 51 years suggesting that the study largely represents families in their middle years which is significant since this is the stage when responsibilities such as child-rearing, economic stability and family planning are most prominent.

About 39% had attained Inter to Bachelor level education and 21% had Master or higher levels of education which shows that a majority of respondents were educated. Almost 26% had only primary to matric level of education. 14% had no formal education highlighting the educational disparities typical of semi-urban and rural Punjab and this mix provides a diverse basis for understanding how education influences family structure transformation.

Occupational status shows diversity. About 30% respondents were engaged in labor or skilled work while 20% were self-employed or business owners. About 27.5% had government or private jobs which reflects formal sector employment and 22.5% were housewives which indicates the traditional role of women in the household and this occupational spread is important in studying economic determinants of family system change.

Majority (41%) fell in the 30,001–60,000 PKR monthly income bracket which is followed by 29% earning less than 30,000 PKR. 20% respondents earned 60,001–100,000 PKR and only 10% were in above 100,000 PKR group showing that most respondents belonged to low- to middle-income households with relatively fewer in the higher income brackets. So economic pressures are one of the major causes of the shift from joint to nuclear families Through comparison, it becomes evident that education and income serve as key drivers of family transformation as those respondents who have higher education (Bachelor’s and above) were more inclined towards nuclear family living emphasizing independence, privacy and modern lifestyles. On the contrary, those respondents who have lower education levels were more likely to maintain joint family arrangement valuing traditional support systems. The higher-income households (above 60,000 PKR) showed a great preference for nuclear family as financial stability allowed



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them to live independently. The lower-income households (below 30,000 PKR) were more dependent on joint family for economic cooperation and shared responsibilities. Males often preferred nuclear households for autonomy. women (especially housewives) valued the joint family system for social and emotional support.

Table 2: Association between Education and Family Type (N = 200)

Education Level	Joint Families (Observed)	Nuclear Families (Observed)	Joint Families (Expected)	N Families (Expected)	χ^2 Value
No formal education (28)	20	8	14.0	14.0	5.14
Primary-Matriculation (52)	32	20	26.0	26.0	2.76
Intermediate–Bachelor’s (78)	34	44	39.0	39.0	1.28
Master’s & above (42)	14	28	21.0	21.0	4.66
Total (200)	100	100	100.0	100.0	13.84

(χ^2): 13.84 (df): 3 (p-value): < 0.01 $\alpha = 0.05$ (df = 3): 7.815

Chi-Square test highlights statistically significant association between **educational level** and their preference for **family type** ($\chi^2 = 13.84$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.01$) as the data reveals that respondents with **no formal education** or only **primary to matriculation education** were more likely to live in **joint families** due to dependence on traditional support system and limited exposure to modern values. Those respondents with **higher education levels (Intermediate, Bachelor’s, Master’s, and above)** showed stronger preference for **nuclear families** which reflects the influence of education on promoting values of independence, privacy, and modern living arrangements. These findings highlight the role of education as a key driver in the **change of family structures** in Punjab where greater educational attainment corresponds with a shift away from the traditional joint family model toward nuclear households.

Table 3: Association between Income and Family Type

Income	Joint Families (Observed)	N Families (Observed)	Joint Families (Expected)	N Families (Expected)	χ^2 Value
Less than 30,000 (58)	40	18	29.0	29.0	8.34
30,001–60,000 (82)	44	38	41.0	41.0	0.44
60,001–100,000 (40)	12	28	20.0	20.0	6.40
Above 100,000 (20)	4	16	10.0	10.0	7.20
Total (200)	100	100	100.0	100.0	22.38

(χ^2): 22.38 (df): 3 (p-value): < 0.001 $\alpha = 0.05$ (df = 3): 7.815

The above table shows that the respondents with low monthly income below 30,000 favored joint families (69%) where shared housing and pooled resources reduce financial burdens and those with higher monthly income above 60,000 showed a strong preference



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for nuclear households 70–80% as financial stability enables independence from extended family structures. The middle-income group showed a relatively balanced distribution which indicates a transitional stage where economic ability begins to influence family structure choice and this result confirms that income is a critical socio-economic factor shaping the shift from joint to nuclear families in Punjab with financial independence allowing families to opt for nuclear living, while economic vulnerability reinforces dependence on joint arrangements.

Table 4: Age Group & Family Type

Age Groups	Joint Family	Nuclear Family	Total
20–30 years (45)	10 (22.2%)	35 (77.8%)	45
31–40 years (70)	20 (28.6%)	50 (71.4%)	70
41–50 years (55)	30 (54.5%)	25 (45.5%)	55
51 years & above (30)	20 (66.7%)	10 (33.3%)	30
Total (200)	80 (40.0%)	120 (60.0%)	200

Chi-Square Value (χ^2) = 18.92, df = 3, p < 0.01 (significant)

The analysis of above table highlights a highly significant association between age and family type preference as the findings illustrate that younger respondents (20–30 years and 31–40 years) prefer nuclear families (77.8% and 71.4% respectively) highlighting a generational change towards independence, privacy and urban lifestyle. The older respondents (41–50 years and 51+ years) are more inclined towards joint family system (54.5% and 66.7%) due to traditional values, social security and reliance on collective support network suggesting that age is a key determinant in the transformation of family structures in Pakistan.

Table 5: Occupation and Family Type

Occupation	Joint Family	Nuclear Family	Total
Labor/Skilled worker (60)	40 (66.7%)	20 (33.3%)	60
Business/Self-employed (40)	15 (37.5%)	25 (62.5%)	40
Govt./Private job (55)	15 (27.3%)	40 (72.7%)	55
Housewives (45)	25 (55.6%)	20 (44.4%)	45
Total (200)	95 (47.5%)	105 (52.5%)	200

Chi-Square Value (χ^2) = 21.36, df = 3, p < 0.01 (significant)

The above table indicates significant association between occupation and family type preference. Those respondents who are working in government or private sector jobs (72.7%) and business/self-employment (62.5%) favored nuclear families which indicates that stable income, urban exposure and professional independence encourage smaller family setups. The labor/skilled workers (66.7%) and housewives (55.6%) reported a preference for joint family. It reflects their reliance on extended kinship networks for economic stability, childcare and shared resources and this result highlights that occupation shapes family structure preferences with economically secure and professionally active individuals gravitating toward nuclear families while those in vulnerable roles sustain the joint family tradition as a social safety net.



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CONCLUSION

The present study points out that the shift from joint to nuclear families in Pakistan is constructed by multiple socio-demographic and economic factors. The findings of the study illustrate that education, occupation, income and age play key and decisive role in determining family structure preferences. The younger, educated and professionally employed people are more inclined towards nuclear family valuing independence, privacy and modern lifestyle. The older, less educated and economically vulnerable people still favor the joint family system as it provides security, shared responsibilities and cultural continuity. Results reflect a generational and socio-economic transition in Pakistan where modernization and urbanization are accelerating the decline of joint family while traditional values continue to sustain them among certain groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There should be Educational campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits and challenges of both joint and nuclear family systems, encouraging a balanced approach.

The community centers and social welfare organizations should promote respect and interaction between younger and older generations.

The Government policies should be formulated to support both joint and nuclear families such as tax reliefs, housing schemes and subsidies for family welfare.

The employers should encourage flexible working hours. There should be maternity/paternity leaves and family-friendly policies to reduce the strain on nuclear families.

The strong social security and pension system can reduce dependence on joint family for financial support in old age.

Cooperation, empathy and family responsibility should be included in school and college curricula to strengthen social cohesion.

The religious leaders and cultural organizations should emphasize the importance of family solidarity, tolerance and mutual support.

Programs should empower women by providing opportunities for skill development and income generation, reducing dependence on joint family structures.

More localized studies should be conducted across urban and rural regions of Pakistan to understand evolving family patterns and provide data-driven recommendations for policymakers.

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