









Joint Family or Nuclear Family: The Youth's Perspective

Afifa Khalid¹ 
Aqsa Painda Khan² 
Sadia Mangan³ 
Sateesh Kumar⁴ 
Shivam Golani⁵ 
Kashaf Aqeel Zaidi⁶ 



(✉ Corresponding Author)

^{1,2,3,4,5} Ziauddin University Karachi, Pakistan.
¹Email: afifkhalid300@gmail.com Tel: 03419902383
²Email: aqsapaindakhan@gmail.com Tel: 03152050183
³Email: sadiamangan@gmail.com Tel: +923362826627
⁴Email: sk+177606@gmail.com Tel: 03313799564
⁵Email: Shivamgolani78@gmail.com Tel: 03142830030
⁶Lecturer, Ziauddin University Karachi, Pakistan.
⁶Email: kashafazaidi@gmail.com Tel: +923002839300

Abstract

To identify the youth's perspective regarding joint and nuclear family systems and the factors contributing to it. A cross-sectional study conducted in 2020 in Karachi. The target population was between 18 and 45 years of age with a sample size of 523. An online questionnaire was circulated through convenience sampling technique. Data was imported and analyzed in SPSS Version 20. The sample population included 523 participants with n=441(84.3%) between 18-24 years and a female predominance n=333(63.7%). N= 454 (86.8%) participants were single. More than half n=298(57%) live in a nuclear family system, whereas, 194(37.1%) live in a joint family system. Majority n=321 (61.3%) believed there is greater expectation to agree with the opinion of the head of the family in a joint family system and lesser freedom. Mixed views were reflected regarding an increased emotional and financial stability in a joint family system with 42.8% and 59.5%, respectively. The global drift from joint family systems towards nuclear family systems was also evident in our study. The younger generation prefers nuclear family systems as they feel it respects their privacy and freedom. Moreover, it also dissociates them from any family disputes and undue stress associated with it.

Keywords: Family systems, Joint family, Nuclear family.

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Contribution of this paper to the literature

This study identifies the youth's perspective regarding joint and nuclear family systems and the factors contributing to it.

1. Introduction

A family is defined as a group of people who generally live under one roof, eat food cooked on one hearth, and have property in common (Thomas, 1995). A nuclear family is a household consisting of two married heterosexual parents and their legal children (Bansal, Dixit, Shivram, Pandey, & Saroshe, 2014). Whereas, joint family systems are connected economically, physically, socially, and ritually (Säävälä, 1998). In this system, the unit is not limited to the husband, wife, and children, but depends on various family relationships (Chandrasekhar, 1943). In a joint household, family members pool their earnings together to fulfill the needs of all members (Säävälä, 1998). The incidence of joint family households is highest among the higher socio-income population. There is often an inherent conflict within joint families, over personal ties and obligations generated within separate nuclear units and those holding the entire household together (Wheaton, 1975). The increasing economic rationality is causing disintegration of the joint family system and an increase in percentage of nuclear families (Owens, 1971). Therefore, nuclear family system is currently the most common residential form (Conklin, 1969). Joint family systems have some major benefits; they guarantee a time for all members to come together including family meals which are a central ritual and the most frequent activity in this system (Garmienė, Žemaitienė, & Zaborskis, 2006). Moreover, joint family systems offer greater support as compared to nuclear families in reducing stress and mental health problems (Wheaton, 1975). However, one major drawback of the joint family system is the lack of privacy, and hindrance to individual expression (Desai & Shah, 1983). Therefore, cultural associations have a significant impact on aversion to joint families such as in Americans (Kertzer, 1989). The partitioning of a joint family depends on three factors; including economic condition, the size of living space, and the control of an elderly person in the family (Khuda-E-Barkat, 1985). One of the qualities of a joint family is generally said to be stability involving finances and social support (Madan, 1962). In some ethnicities, the disintegration of joint family systems was claimed to be an inevitable result of their country's path to modernity (Denault, 2009). The drawback of nuclear families is that they lack support networks so their rise is dependent on the growth of the state and of individual dedication (Denault, 2009) the nuclear family a primary and direct relationship exists between the two generations living together while the joint family setup has an indirect and secondary sort of relationship with its members (Bilal, Tariq, Aleem, Shabbir, & Parveen, 2013).

Previous studies have shown a significant preference for nuclear family systems including the 2011 census of India with nuclear families comprising of 70% of the population (Khuda-E-Barkat, 1985). However, amongst the rural settlements, more than 50% of the households are living in joint family systems (Khuda-E-Barkat, 1985). Moreover, with a higher likelihood of having individuals of similar age groups in a joint family system, children and adolescents were less likely to have organized leisure-time activities (OLTA) resulting in more time spent watching television and playing video games (Badura et al., 2017). Average time spent with family particularly during meal times, was on the decline, especially on working days. Employed women spent less time on family meals than unemployed women (Minna, 1998). Furthermore, elderly people living in extended households were found to have better living conditions (Manfredini & Breschi, 2013). A study conducted identified disputes over financial and property matters resulting in disintegration of a joint family in 79% of the population (Owens, 1971). Even though 61% of the population was found to be against the idea of separation of brothers after the death of the father, only 37% continued living in the joint family system (Owens, 1971). A study conducted in West Bengal revealed that 2% of families experienced disintegration before the death of the father and only 10% continued to live in a joint family system after his death (Orenstein & Micklin, 1967) And the level of satisfaction was found to be higher among people living in the joint family system ie, 87.5% v/s 81% (< 0.001) compared to the nuclear family system (Lodhi et al., 2019). Moreover 52 % adolescents reported difficulty in talking with new people. Majority of participants from Joint family reported good social adjustment (38%) and high resilience (17%) as compared to those in nuclear family (21%, 13%) (Sahar & Muzaffar, 2017).

There has been a significant drift in the family systems in the recent years, with more individuals preferring nuclear family systems but very little research has been done in our country regarding this. The objective of our study is to determine the common perspective and identify advantages and disadvantages that play a role in forming the perspective. Moreover, the study will be focused on identifying the differences in mentality with respect to gender, socioeconomic status, urban or rural settlement and ethnicities. It is important to identify these differences as they contribute to the emotional and mental well-being of an individual.

2. Materials and Methods

This was a cross-sectional study conducted in 2020, data was collected between April and July in Karachi, Pakistan. The sample size calculated was $n=384$ which was calculated based on a proportion of 50%, bound of error was 5% and confidence level was taken as 95%. An online questionnaire developed on Google Forms was circulated via social media, various websites and social forums through convenience sampling technique. It was an online survey as data was collected during the COVID pandemic. The target population was young people between 18 and 45 years of age. An informed consent was taken at the beginning of the survey and those who did not wish to continue were allowed to leave the survey. The questionnaire was developed through literature review and researches conducted on similar topics. (1,9) Demographic profile variables included age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-income status. The questions related to joint family acquired opinions regarding joint and nuclear families. Data entry was done on Microsoft Excel via Google Forms which was imported to SPSS Version 20. Descriptive analysis for numerical data was done through mean and standard deviation and for categorical data through frequencies and percentages. Chi square test was applied to identify associations between demographic factors and opinion about joint and nuclear families. A p-value of less than 0.05 was taken as significant. Institutional ethical approval was taken from the institute prior to the initiation of the study.

3. Results

The sample population consisted of 523 participants with majority $n=441(84.3\%)$ were aged between 18-24 years, $n=52(9.9\%)$ were between 25-30 years, $n=23(4.4\%)$ between 35-44 years, $n=7(1.3\%)$ were above the age of 45 years. The sample was predominantly female $n=333(63.7\%)$ and $n=190(36.3\%)$ were males. The reported marital status was predominantly single $n=454(86.8\%)$ whereas, $n=42(8.0\%)$ were married, $n=25(4.8\%)$ were engaged and $n=2(0.4\%)$ were separated. Our study revealed that $n=298(57\%)$ were living in a nuclear family system, whereas, $194(37.1\%)$ were living in a joint family system, and a small proportion of the sample $n=31(5.9\%)$ were living alone and away from their family.

Upon enquiring if females preferred joining a joint family system after marriage, $n=132(25.2\%)$ strongly disagreed and $n=218(41.7\%)$ disagreed, reflecting the majority. However, $n=18(3.4\%)$ strongly agreed, $n=39(7.5\%)$ agreed and $n=116(22.2\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed. The participants were asked if newly married woman find it easier to adapt to the rules and expectations of a joint family, most of the people disagreed. Majority of the population either strongly disagreed or disagreed with $n=178(34\%)$ and $n=195(37.5\%)$ respectively. Only $n=22(4.2\%)$ strongly agreed, $n=55(10.7\%)$ agreed and $n=71(13.6\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed. Our study revealed that people think it is more likely for joint family members to develop dispute/difference of opinion /conflicts as compared to nuclear family system. $N=33(23.7\%)$ strongly agreed and $n=71(33.1\%)$ agreed. Whereas, $n=131(13.4\%)$ strongly disagreed, $n=170(10.9\%)$ disagreed and $n=118(18.9\%)$ remained neutral. Majority of our participants believed that the idea of more personal space and freedom in a joint family is incorrect as $n=199(38.0\%)$ strongly disagreed, $n=174(33.3\%)$ disagreed as opposed to $n=71(13.6\%)$ agreed and $n=79(15.1\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed. In our study we enquired if joint family system offered greater support and stability to individual members than nuclear families; majority of the people strongly agreed and agreed with $n=80(15.3\%)$ and $n=144(27.5\%)$, respectively. Whereas, a large proportion also strongly disagreed and disagreed, with $n=91(17.4\%)$ strongly disagreed and $n=85(18.3\%)$ disagreed. Moreover, $n=123(23.5\%)$ had a neutral stance regarding this. Participants were asked if joint family systems have greater expectation from a couple to have children than nuclear family, majority of the population either agreed or strongly agreed with $n=266(50.9\%)$. However, $n=137(26.2\%)$ disagreed or strongly disagreed and $n=120(22.9\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed. Upon enquiring if greater importance is given to opinions of individual joint family system, $n=131(25.0\%)$ strongly disagreed and $n=170(32.5\%)$ disagreed, reflecting the majority. However, $n=33(6.3\%)$ strongly agreed, $n=71(13.6\%)$ agreed and $n=118(22.6\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed. Our study revealed that people believe that male family members are given more importance over female members in joint family systems. $N=129(24.7\%)$ strongly agreed and $n=171(32.7\%)$ agreed. Whereas, $n=66(11.9\%)$ strongly disagreed, $n=62(12.6\%)$ disagreed and $n=95(18.2\%)$ remained neutral. The participants were asked if female family members are given more importance over those of male family members in the joint family system, majority of the people disagreed. Majority of the population either strongly disagreed or disagreed with $n=115(22.0\%)$ and $n=192(36.7\%)$ respectively. Only $n=20(3.8\%)$ strongly agreed, $n=54(10.3\%)$ agreed and $n=142(27.2\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed. Participants were asked if children face more competition and comparison with peers of the same age in a joint family system. Majority of the population, $n=172(32.9\%)$ strongly agreed, $n=153(29.3\%)$ agreed, $n=42(8.0\%)$ disagreed and $n=77(14.7\%)$ strongly disagreed. Whereas, $n=79(15.1\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed. In our study we enquired if there is greater expectation to agree with the opinion of the head of family in joint family system as compared to nuclear family system. Majority of the individuals either agreed or strongly agreed with $n=321(61.3\%)$, as opposed to $n=46(8.8\%)$ who disagreed, $n=81(15.5\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed and $n=75(14.3\%)$ strongly disagreed. Our study determined that majority of the people disagreed with the prevalence of gender equality in joint family systems with $n=257(50\%)$. Whereas, $n=173(19.3\%)$ agreed and $n=165(31.5\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed. During our survey we asked individuals about their opinion about people having a greater sense of emotional and mental stability in joint family. Mixed opinions were seen where $n=94(18\%)$ agreed, $n=60(11.5\%)$ strongly agreed, $n=121(23.1\%)$ disagreed, $n=100(19.1\%)$ strongly disagreed and $n=148(28.3\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed.

Our study revealed that people have mixed views regarding a decreased financial burden and problems in a joint family system as opposed to nuclear family. $N=73(14.0\%)$ strongly agreed and $n=139(26.6\%)$ agreed. Whereas, $n=82(15.7\%)$ strongly disagreed, $n=89(17.0\%)$ disagreed and $n=140(26.8\%)$ remained neutral. Upon enquiring if greater respect is given to elders in joint family systems, $n=74(14.1\%)$ strongly disagreed and $n=62(11.9\%)$ disagreed, reflecting the minority. However, $n=123(23.5\%)$ strongly agreed, $n=147(28.1\%)$ agreed and $n=117(22.4\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed. People were found to have mixed views regarding the existence of deeper emotional relationship between family members as compared to nuclear family. $N=85(16.3\%)$ strongly agreed, $n=133(25.4\%)$ agreed, $n=91(17.4\%)$ disagreed, $n=92(17.6\%)$ strongly disagreed and $n=122(23.3\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed. Most of the individuals agreed that joint family systems give preference to arranged marriages over love marriages with $n=251(47.8)$. Whereas, $n=135(25.8\%)$ disagreed and $n=137(26.2\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed.

Moreover, our study determined that people believe individuals brought up in joint families tend to find it easier to adapt and adjust to their changes in their surroundings and lifestyles as compared to those brought up in nuclear family systems. $N=68(13.0\%)$ strongly agreed, $N=134(25.6\%)$ agreed, $n=152(29.1\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed, $n=101(19.3\%)$ disagreed and $n=68(13.0\%)$ strongly disagreed. The participants were asked about whether the amount of care for the elderly is given more importance in joint family system than nuclear family systems. Majority of the sample either strongly agreed or agreed with $N=107(20.5\%)$ and $n=151(28.9\%)$, respectively. Whereas, $n=144(27.1\%)$ disagreed and $n=121(23.1\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed. Property related disputes amongst legal heirs are more prevalent in joint family systems than in nuclear family systems. Majority of the population agreed with this statement, $n=118(22.6\%)$ strongly agreed, $n=144(27.5\%)$ agreed, $n=58(11.1\%)$ disagreed, $n=135(25.8\%)$ neither agree nor disagree and $n=68(13.0\%)$ strongly disagreed.

Participants were asked if in their opinion joint family systems offered a greater level of the personal happiness than nuclear family systems. Majority of the population either strongly disagreed or disagreed with $n=111(21.2\%)$ and $n=121(23.1\%)$, respectively. However, $n=90(17.2\%)$ agreed, $n=159(30.4\%)$ neither agreed nor disagreed and $n=42(8.0\%)$ strongly agreed.

4. Discussion

Previous studies suggest the changes occurring in traditional joint family systems can be attributed to adaptive processes. Our study established that it is difficult to adjust in a joint family system for most people particularly for the newly married individuals (Thomas, 1995). In accordance with previous studies, the population believed that males in nuclear families have to work harder than males living in joint families due to the distribution of work in the latter. Moreover, females living in joint families have a higher work load than those living in nuclear families possibly due to a higher number of family members. The study sample believed that females in joint families have lesser freedom as compared to those living in nuclear families, however, according to previous study it is just a misbelief. In our study females preferred nuclear family more as compared to males, which was also established in previous studies (Bansal et al., 2014). Our study showed that joint households almost always dissolve at a certain point, death of the head of the family was identified as the most probable cause followed by disputes over family matters (Säävälä, 1998). In accordance with a previous study, joint family systems were found to have a relatively conservative and reactionary attitude towards women, and to their position in the family which was reinforced by the lack of gender equality as reflected by our participants. A previously conducted study suggests that joint family systems often deny the sympathy, understanding, affection and love from a husband for the young bride across the artificial wall of the female group (Chandrasekhar, 1943). This is a possible cause of women finding it difficult to adjust in joint family household and therefore, avoiding getting married in them, as per our study.

Previous study shows that in joint family household there is an inherent conflict between the personal ties and obligations generated within separate nuclear units and those which hold the entire household together and in our study 33.1% agree on it because sometimes it is not easy for women to obey all the commands of mother in law and father-in-law so dispute and hatred take place and sometimes their own sons want independent life with his wife. The main reason of fights in joint family system is no one want to compromise neither parents nor newly married couples (Wheaton, 1975). According to previous study there is no significant relationship at the .05 level shown between family types and opinions about children but 32.9% people in our study believe that children and family system have relation. Children face more competition and comparison in a joint family system. In joint family system all the members who are living together are responsible for the behavior, habit and nature of child but in the nuclear family parents are totally responsible (Conklin, 1969).

In accordance with previous studies that were conducted which identified high savings rates for earning members in the nuclear family system as opposed to the joint family system, but estates are likely to accumulate for longer time periods in joint families as compared to our data in which 26.6% people agree that joint family provides financial support to individuals members as they have their parents heirloom which is inherited to their children and is used in their business and betterment of their living. While in nuclear family consist of less people, so less people to spend money on and they save a lot of money on their own than in joint family (Khuda-E-Barkat, 1985).

In previous studies it was identified that stability is quality of joint families, which may be in the form of economical support, work load compared to joint family. With sufficient role differentiation within the family, individual's authority among the generations, and longevity of members of the family. While in our study, 27.5% agree on that joint families provide emotional and mental stability along with economical support. Whereas, in nuclear family there is not much support from family, there is pooling of work, lesser economic stability possibly due to limited earning members, often only one, increasing the mental stress (Bansal et al., 2014).

As compared to previous data which says that joint families offer greater support than nuclear families in reducing stress and mental health problems, only 17.2% agree on this because now people often rely on friends, social circles and immediate family members to discuss emotions to achieve mental and psychological satisfaction. (Kertzer, 1989). Previous studies have shown a significant preference for nuclear family systems including the 2011 census of India with nuclear families comprising of 70% of the population (Minna, 1998). However, amongst the rural settlements, more than 50% of the households are living in joint family systems. But now time has changed, nuclear family has been given more importance than joint family system. About 90% of the population now prefer living in a nuclear family (Manfredini & Breschi, 2013). While family models have been relatively stable in India during the past few decades preserving the joint family system and its values (Orenstein & Micklin, 1967). There is a significant drift in the family models in Pakistan, as stated by our study also.

Previously there is no empirical evidence to show that a joint family could not provide a good adaptive vehicle for solving the problems and 27.5% people accept that joint family system give us support and help us because a woman living alone and faced with the crisis of a sick baby might very well be consoled to be living with an experienced mother who could offer advice on what to do next (Conklin., 1973). Although we find a significant association between living arrangements and psychological complaints, the living arrangements only explain a small share of children's psychological health. This is because of lack of communication and love in nuclear family systems as compared to joint families where there are more people to share one's feelings with (Fransson, Turunen, Hjern, Östberg, & Bergström, 2016). In joint families, three generations live together and the head of the household bears the cost of maintaining his parents as well as his children. By the same token, he need not save for his retirement as he is assured of being looked after by his children. In accordance with previous studies conducted, income and wealth distribution have been increasingly brought into public attention in recent years. The overwhelming bulk of both theoretical and empirical research in this area has been concerned with nuclear families. When we inquired our population that individual more likely to feel a greater sense of emotional and mental stability in joint family as compared to nuclear family, 42% disagreed with the statement. In many families, the joint legacy continues till the head is holding the family together and after head dies many issues like inequality of wealth distribution or property occur. Therefore, many people have changed their thoughts regarding this and usually end up distributing wealth during their lifetime. This distribution of rights and properties is also a probable cause of the increase in number of nuclear families recently. (Desai & Shah, 1983) According to previous studies good family time in joint family has greater impact on children specifically in adolescent life like their education, their behavior, health and wellbeing. However, our research revealed that 29.3% of the participants believed that children face more competition and comparison with peers at same age regarding education and behavior because joint family includes 2 or more families with their children of their own which causing unhealthy competition between the children. This often evolves into family fights as parents tend to compete and develop a superiority or

inferiority complex depending on their child's performance in school and otherwise. For instance if a child is better at academics and other activities, then his or her opinion will hold more weightage to the elders of that family as opposed to those children are may not be as good (Sweeting, West, & Richards, 1998). Some studies have shown that many of the nuclear families in urban centers are very closely linked to joint families in rural areas or to other urban families by property ties, mutual aid, visiting, and others. Therefore, the projected disappearance of the joint family under the impact of urbanization and industrialization is more hypothetical than real. There will undoubtedly be changes wrought in this institution but its disappearance is anything but imminent. Certain aspects of urbanization may even strengthen the joint family. With increased resources available to previously economically depressed caste groups, members of these castes may be in a position to emulate higher caste groups by combining into joint family units (Eames, 1967). In accordance to previous studies which identifies a strong preference for sons over daughters in the Indian society allows us the use of a novel instrumental variable, namely whether the first child is a girl, to test the Q-Q trade-off. When we inquired our population that Gender equality is more prevalent in joint family system than nuclear family system majority population field of vision was unsatisfied with statement only 14% agree and majority 30% disagree. In our opinion the concept of gender discrimination has changed now but in rural areas or in areas with low literature rate parents still prefer male child to be their first and expect male will give support to the family and female will settle with her husband.it could be the reason the gender equality couldn't be maintained yet female rights have been compromised as compare to male. We find that family size has a significant negative causal impact on educational outcomes of children. After controlling for potential endogeneity, an additional child in the family reduces the likelihood of ever having been enrolled and of currently being enrolled in school as well as years of schooling (Kugler & Kumar, 2017). We found that time spent with both partner and children declined seriously in joint family system and previous study also shows the same result (Mestdag & Vandeweyer, 2005). Our study conclude that joint family system supports its members and according to previous study which says that joint family type provides social & financial support to its members because living with each other build more love and emotions, they help each other (Sahar & Muzaffar, 2017). In both nuclear and joint both family systems the role of parents is more influential than any other member of the family. The students get encouragement and confidence through the involvement of the parents. The involvement and attention of the parents are the significant factors that affect the academic performance of the students. As compared to our studies Children face more competition and comparison with peers of the same age in a joint family system as compared to nuclear family as there is lack of attention can cause loss of interest in their studies with lack of confidence in their personality as compared more with their friends (Bilal et al., 2013).

5. Conclusion

This research presents the youth's perspective regarding joint and nuclear family systems. The younger generation prefers nuclear family systems as they feel it respects their privacy and freedom. Moreover, the youth does not want to get involved in problems associated with joint family systems including disputes over property and other issues after the death of the head of the family. Thus, the compromise in emotional and personal liberty is the most probable reason for the drift in youth's preferences from joint family systems towards nuclear family systems.

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