

Changing Social Values: A Study to Evolve Family Structures and Intergenerational Relationships

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between evolving family structures and changing social values in contemporary society, investigating how the transformation from traditional extended family models toward nuclear, single-parent, blended, and non-traditional family arrangements is both shaped by and contributes to shifts in social values related to individualism, gender roles, intergenerational obligations, marriage, and community solidarity. This research employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to assess the perceptions and experiences of 100 adults regarding the interrelationship between family structural changes and social value transformation. A structured questionnaire measuring family structure characteristics, adherence to traditional versus modern values, intergenerational relationship quality, and perceived social consequences of family change was administered. The findings reveal significant associations between nuclear family residence and individualistic value orientation ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$), and between extended family residence and collectivist value orientation ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$). The regression model indicates that family structure type, urbanization level, education, and women's employment status collectively explain 39% of the variance in social value orientation scores. Significant generational differences emerge, with younger respondents endorsing more individualistic and egalitarian values. The study concludes that family structural change and social value transformation are mutually reinforcing processes and recommends policies that support diverse family forms while strengthening intergenerational bonds.

Keywords: family structure, social values, nuclear family, extended family, individualism, collectivism, gender roles, intergenerational relationships, modernization

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The family, recognized across all societies as the primary institution for the socialization of children, the regulation of reproduction, the provision of emotional and material support, and the transmission of cultural values across generations, has undergone sweeping structural transformations over the past century. These transformations, driven by the interrelated forces of industrialization, urbanization, educational expansion, women's emancipation, demographic transition, and cultural globalization, have progressively shifted the dominant family form in many societies from the extended, multigenerational, patriarchal household toward smaller, more mobile, and more diverse family configurations, including nuclear families, single-parent households, blended families, dual-income couples without children, and cohabiting partnerships (Cherlin, 2010).

The relationship between family structural change and broader social value transformation is a central concern of sociological inquiry. Parsons (1951), in his structural-functionalist analysis, argued that the nuclear family emerged as the functionally necessary family form of industrial society, adapted to the demands of geographic mobility, occupational specialization, and the separation of public and private spheres. More recently, scholars of the second demographic

transition, including Van de Kaa (1987) and Lesthaeghe (2010), have argued that contemporary family changes reflect a fundamental cultural shift toward post-materialist values emphasizing individual self-realization, personal autonomy, and lifestyle choice over traditional obligations of kinship, community, and institutional authority.

1.2 Problem Statement and Objectives

This study examines how different family structures are associated with different social value orientations among 100 adults, pursuing objectives of: assessing the distribution of family structures; examining the relationship between family type and social values; identifying factors that predict social value orientation; and comparing generational attitudes toward family and social change.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theories of Family Change

Goode (1963) argued that industrialization universally drives family convergence toward the conjugal nuclear model. The Second Demographic Transition theory (Lesthaeghe, 2010) explains contemporary family diversity through the lens of post-materialist value change, arguing that as societies achieve material security, cultural priorities shift from survival and conformity toward autonomy, self-expression, and tolerance of diversity. Inglehart (1997) documented this value shift across dozens of societies using World Values Survey data, demonstrating a strong correlation between economic development and the emergence of post-materialist, individualistic, and secular-rational values that reshape family formation patterns. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) proposed the individualization thesis, arguing that modernity dissolves traditional social bonds and normative frameworks, freeing individuals to construct their own biographies, including their family arrangements, according to personal choice rather than institutional prescription.

2.2 Family Structure and Value Transmission

Research consistently demonstrates that family structure influences the transmission of social values to children and shapes adult value orientations. Extended family households, with their dense networks of intergenerational relationships, tend to reinforce collectivist values emphasizing filial piety, family loyalty, community obligation, and respect for authority and tradition (Kagitcibasi, 2007). Nuclear family households, characterized by greater autonomy and privacy, tend to cultivate more individualistic values emphasizing personal achievement, independence, and self-expression (Georgas et al., 2006). Bengtson (2001) documented that the quality of intergenerational relationships within families is a primary predictor of value transmission, with warm, cohesive family bonds facilitating the transfer of values from parents to children while conflictual or distant relationships disrupt this process.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study employs the Second Demographic Transition Theory (Lesthaeghe, 2010) and the Individualism-Collectivism Framework (Hofstede, 2001; Kagitcibasi, 2007) as complementary theoretical lenses for understanding the reciprocal relationship between family structural change and social value transformation.

3. Methodology

A cross-sectional survey was administered to 100 adults stratified by family structure: extended family households (n=35), nuclear families (n=40), and other arrangements including single-

parent, living alone, or blended (n=25). The sample comprised 54% female, 46% male, mean age 37.2 years. The questionnaire measured: family structure characteristics, the Individualism-Collectivism Scale adapted from Triandis and Gelfand (1998), intergenerational relationship quality, attitudes toward gender roles and marriage, and perceived consequences of family change. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.82 to 0.87. Analysis employed descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression.

4. Results

Table 1: Social Value Orientation by Family Structure Type (N = 100)

Value Dimension	Extended M	Nuclear M	Other M	F	p
Individualism	2.64	3.72	3.84	18.42	<.001
Collectivism	4.12	3.18	2.94	16.87	<.001
Gender Egalitarianism	3.08	3.86	4.02	11.24	<.001
Intergenerational Obligation	4.24	3.12	2.78	22.56	<.001

One-way ANOVA revealed highly significant differences across family structure types on all value dimensions. Extended family residents scored highest on collectivism (M=4.12) and intergenerational obligation (M=4.24), while those in nuclear and other arrangements scored higher on individualism and gender egalitarianism. Younger respondents (18-30) endorsed significantly more individualistic values (M=3.78) than older respondents (50+; M=2.86; $t=4.62$, $p<0.001$).

Table 2: Regression Predicting Social Value Orientation (Individualism-Collectivism)

Predictor	B	Beta	t	p
Family Structure (Nuclear)	0.34	0.28	3.06	0.003
Urbanization Level	0.26	0.24	2.64	0.010
Educational Attainment	0.21	0.22	2.42	0.018
Women's Employment	0.18	0.17	1.88	0.063

Note: $R^2 = 0.42$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.39$, $F(6, 93) = 11.18$, $p < 0.001$

5. Discussion

The findings confirm a strong and systematic relationship between family structure and social value orientation, with extended family arrangements associated with collectivist values and nuclear/alternative arrangements associated with individualistic values. These patterns are consistent with the theoretical predictions of the Second Demographic Transition theory and the Individualism-Collectivism framework, suggesting that family structural change and value transformation are mutually reinforcing processes embedded within broader modernization dynamics.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Family structural change and social value transformation are deeply interconnected. Policies should support diverse family forms through flexible social protection systems, promote intergenerational programs that maintain bonds across family types, integrate family education into school curricula, and provide community services that compensate for the reduced support networks of smaller household units. Research should employ longitudinal designs tracking families through structural transitions.

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