

Changes of Family Structure in Nepal

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Abstract

This research article explores the changing family structures in DiktelRupakotMajhuwagadhi Municipality, Khotang, Nepal, driven by various factors such as modernization, globalization, urbanization, and westernization. The study employs a cross-sectional design with a purposive sampling method, gathering data from 1032 respondents who are heads of their respective families, sons, and daughters. The research examines the transition from extended family structures to nuclear families, family authority patterns, healthcare preferences, and economic conditions. The findings indicate a significant shift towards nuclear families, with 70% of families being small nuclear units, and 30% being larger joint family systems. Family authority is increasingly shared between husbands and wives, with both spouses making joint decisions in areas such as expenditure, agricultural work, marriage, and property-related matters. However, the study acknowledges its limitations and recommends further research to understand the underlying reasons behind the observed changes in family structures and decision-making patterns.

Key Words: Family, family structure, modernization, nuclear family, joint family, decision-making

Introduction

Family can be defined in various ways, and its meaning can be influenced by cultural, social, and personal perspectives. Generally, family refers to a group of people who are connected by blood, marriage, adoption, or a committed partnership. Families provide a sense of belonging, support, and shared identity. The family is a micro social institution, and it is the basic and most significant unit of the society. It is a complex and dynamic institution for many decades and a non-professional unit of human beings where is love, care and affection in each other (Bhasin, 2016). Family plays a vital role for a child to socialize in a society. But the structure of family is being changed day by day; extended family to nuclear family (Yi, 1986). The process of social change like; Modernization, Westernization, Urbanization, Globalization etc. are the main factors of changing society which changes the family structure (Doddamani, 2014).

Ghimire and William (2006) states that the extended or large family has high parental authority where youth have low autonomy. Young age marriage has more fertility levels and late marriage control fertility level. A smaller family which is a nuclear family has low parental control and high youth autonomy, late age marriage and childbearing has high levels of fertility control including childlessness.

Literature Review

Zeng (1986) described on his article '*Changes in Family Structure in China*' that:

The average size of the Chinese family is much smaller than it was before the formation of the People's Republic in 1949. The nuclear family has become the dominant family. The extended family with married brothers living together has become rare; however, the three-generation family remains an important family type in Chinese society. (Zeng, 1986, p. 665)

The structure of families is shifting larger, extended to smaller nuclear families, which are influenced by different factors. The size of Chinese families has significantly decreased compared to the period before the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949. Nowadays, nuclear families are more common, while the traditional extended family, where married brothers reside together, has become uncommon. Despite this shift, the three-generation family structure continues to hold significance in Chinese society.

"The growth of human civilization, change has remained a consistent part of every society though there have been variations in its state and direction" (Kumar, 2012). "Though it is the fact that processes like- Industrialization and Modernization have influenced the traditional structure of family in the early years, but the changes have been rapid in the recent years on the rural society, which has also passed through Globalization and Information" (Premalatha et al., 2019).

According to Smith (2008), over the last three decades the American family has been undergoing a profound and far-reaching transformation. As the core institution of society, the family affects all other aspects of society. This is especially true of politics. Political leanings are notably influenced by both family structure and family values. Moreover, the relationship is dynamic with the connection between the family and politics changing over the last generation.

Bhasin (2016) states,

"Western impact on our Indian culture is felt more and more these days. The impact of western companies and their corporate culture has laid a heavy impact on the youth today. But our culture is one of the oldest and hence it is stable, and nothing can really endanger it. Still a new form of living called nuclear families is on the increase. (2016, p.129)

The complex changes in family life that have taken place in Lesotho over the last hundred years or so have been recently subsumed under the general notion of a 'movement' from the extended family to the nuclear family (Murray, 1980). All the traditional families are extended family all over the world and the modern families are changing to nuclear family.

Primitive families were extended families, gradually it was changed into nuclear family (Ruggles, 1994). He writes :

"Historians and sociologists have expended far more effort attacking the theory of a transition from extended to nuclear family structure than was ever expended promoting it. The notion that our ancestors lived in large extended families is widespread among the public, but it was never more than a minor theme of sociological theorists". (Ruggles, 1994, p.103)

Highly industrialized and urbanized society as the United States of America, ethnic differentials remain important in all the processes of family formation, including the timing of marriage (Kobrin and Goldscheider, 1978).

According to Dangar and Rai (2021) in a traditional Nepali family, the wife takes care of all things, but the husband decides important decisions. But now a days that autonomy of the decision making, movement, purchasing power, self-determination, independence and financial autonomy has increased and responsibilities and obligations such as agricultural work, caretaker of the children and elderly also increased.

Methodology

This paper is prepared in the reference of Diktel Rupakot Majhuwagadhi Municipality, Khotang, Nepal. Purposive sample method was used to collect data where random sampling method was applied out of which 1032 respondents were taken for analyzing the role of globalization, modernization, urbanization, and westernization on family structure. This study was based on the descriptive and explorative way. Most of the data was taken through primary data which was collected through the interview.

Descriptive statistics, percentages, was used to summarize the family structure distribution, family authority patterns, healthcare preferences, and economic conditions. It is tried to maintain the trustworthiness of the study. The research report would provide a balanced interpretation of the findings.

Findings

Changes in Family structure are changing day by day because of influence of Modernization, Globalization, Urbanization and Westernization. Extending family structure has been changing towards nuclear family. The nuclear Family is being fashion and istaking the place of joint family system. In the past, the joint family system was much prevalent in this village community. But in the younger generation nuclear family system is practicing at larger scale. At the time of research, in the past the most of the families were larger in size, but now the family size is changing rapidly. The table below shows the changes in family structure of Diktel Rupakot Majhuwagadhi Municipality, Khotang.

Table 1

Nature and Family size of the Sample

S.No	Nature of Family	Size of Family	Percentage
1	Nuclear	Small (01-06 Members)	70
2	Joint	Large (Above 06 Members)	30
		Total	100

Sources: Survey Questionnaire 2023

The table shows that about 70 percent families belong to small families below 6 members i.e. nuclear family and 30 percent families belongs to large and joint family. Family authority in the changing family is given below:

Table 2

The Family Authority

S. No.	Nature of Decision	Husband	Wife	Both	Percentage
1	Expenditure	(14)	(9)	(77)	100
2	Agricultural work	(5)	(5)	(90)	100
3	Regarding marriage	(5)	(5)	(90)	100
4	Property	(6)	(6)	(88)	100

Sources: Survey Questionnaire 2023

The table No.2 shows that 14 percent husbands decide on family expenditure 9 percent wives and 77 percent both take part for decisions. The Decision on agricultural –work 5 percent only husbands 5 percent only wives and 90 percent both are taking decisions. Only 5 percent husbands, 5 percent wives and 90 percent both decide for marriage. The decisions on property (buying and selling) 6 percent husbands 6 percent wives and 88 percent both are taking decisions.

Table 3

Tendency on Means of Treatment

S.N.	Various means and their use	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	New means of treatment	768	75
2	Traditional means of treatment	96	9
3	Both	168	16
	Total	1032	100

Sources: Survey Questionnaire 2023

The Tendency on Means of Treatment above table shows that 75 percent respondents are practicing modern means of treatment. The respondents who are practicing modern means are educated and they are living in urban area, 9 percent of respondents are practicing traditional means of treatment and 16 percent of respondents are practicing both, new means of treatment and traditional means of treatment.

Table 4

The Change in the Economic condition of the Family

S.N.	Change in economic condition	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Changed	936	91
2	No –changed	96	9
	Total	1032	100

Sources: Survey Questionnaire 2023

The above table shows that the 91 percent of respondents have agreed that there has changed in the economic condition of the family, where only 9 percent of respondents have not changed economic condition of family. The family which has changed the economic condition, they don't have single financial authority. Such types of authority is provided to all the members of the family and this change may be the impact of education and opportunity of earning.

Discussion

Transition from Joint to Nuclear Family Structure

The research findings indicate a significant shift in family structure from joint families to nuclear families. This change is attributed to various factors such as modernization, globalization, urbanization, and westernization. The prevalence of nuclear families at a larger scale, especially among the younger generation, suggests a trend towards more independent and smaller family units.

Changing Family Authority

Table 2 shows the distribution of decision-making authority within families. The results indicate that decision-making is no longer concentrated solely in the hands of husbands or wives but is increasingly becoming a joint responsibility. This shift towards joint decision-making reflects a more egalitarian approach to family dynamics, where both spouses are actively involved in major family decisions such as expenditure, agricultural work, marriage, and property-related matters.

Adoption of Modern Means of Treatment:

The survey on means of treatment (Table 3) reveals that a significant majority of respondents (75%) prefer modern means of treatment over traditional ones. This preference for modern treatments is more pronounced among educated individuals living in urban areas. The growing acceptance of modern healthcare options could be attributed to increased awareness, accessibility, and trust in modern medical practices.

Impact on Economic Condition

Table 4 highlights that a vast majority of respondents (91%) have experienced a change in their family's economic condition. This change is attributed to various factors such as the information revolution, economic independence of men and women, and the influence of modern education and earning opportunities. As a result of this economic transformation, financial authority is no longer concentrated solely in the hands of a single head of the family, but rather, it is distributed among independent and self-sufficient family members.

Implications and Future Outlook

The findings of this research point to significant shifts in family dynamics and decision-making processes in the context of changing family structures in Nepal. The transition towards nuclear families, joint decision-making, and the adoption of modern means of treatment indicates a broader societal transformation influenced by various global forces. Understanding these changes is crucial for policymakers and researchers to address the evolving needs and challenges faced by contemporary Nepalese families.

Limitations and Recommendations

The discussion should also acknowledge any limitations of the study, such as sample size, geographic scope, or potential biases in data collection. Additionally, it may suggest areas for further research to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons behind the observed changes in family structures and decision-making patterns.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research findings provide significant evidence of changing family structures in Diktel Rupakot Majhuwagadhi Municipality, Khotang, Nepal, influenced by modernization, globalization, urbanization, and westernization. The transition from joint family systems to nuclear families is evident, particularly among the younger generation. The majority of families now belong to small nuclear families with 1-6 members, while the prevalence of large joint families has decreased over time.

Regarding family authority, the research highlights a shift towards joint decision-making. In most cases, both husbands and wives participate in making important family decisions, indicating a more egalitarian approach to family dynamics. This change reflects the impact of social and cultural shifts, where traditional gender roles are being redefined and shared decision-making is becoming more common.

The study also reveals a clear preference for modern means of treatment, with 75% of respondents practicing modern healthcare options. This preference is more pronounced among educated individuals living in urban areas. This indicates the influence of access to information, education, and technological advancements on health-seeking behaviors within the community.

Furthermore, the research findings demonstrate a significant change in the economic condition of families in the municipality. Around 91% of respondents reported experiencing an improvement in their economic situation. This change has led to a redistribution of financial authority within households, with decision-making becoming more decentralized among independent and self-sufficient family members. Factors such as the information revolution, economic independence of men and women, and the impact of modern education and earning opportunities are attributed to this economic transformation.

Overall, the findings suggest that the influence of modernization, globalization, urbanization, and westernization is reshaping family structures, decision-making patterns, healthcare preferences, and economic dynamics in the studied community. The changing family structure towards nuclear families, joint decision-making, and the adoption of modern means of treatment has significant implications for policymakers and researchers to understand and address the evolving needs and challenges faced by Nepalese families in the context of broader societal changes.

It is important to acknowledge that the study has its limitations, such as the sample size and geographic scope. However, the findings provide valuable insights into the ongoing transformation of family structures and the factors driving these changes in the municipality. Further research and longitudinal studies may be needed to gain a deeper understanding of the long-term implications of these changes on the well-being and social fabric of the community.

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