

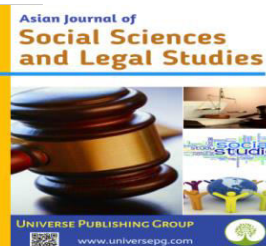


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## Changing Family Structure in Rural Bangladesh: A Sociological Study in Chandpur District of Bangladesh

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores transformative shifts in rural families and family relationships amid 21<sup>st</sup> century dynamics. Analyzing the impact of modernity and globalization, the research delves into the transition from traditional joint families to nuclear units. A triangulation method is followed to explore the objectives where a total of 120 respondents were interviewed using survey method for quantitative data through simple random sampling and Key Informative Interviews to gather qualitative data from two villages of Chandpur district. A theoretical framework has been developed to understand the study concept more precisely. Findings reveal a preference for nuclear families driven by economic advancements, migration, individualism, and media influence. The study highlights the roles of economic opportunity; women's empowerment, education, and internet accessibility accelerate the transformation of traditional family and family relationships. Changes in household authority are observed, with both spouses participating in decision making. Challenges arising from evolving family systems, including moral decay and marital disputes, are discussed. Finally, this study demonstrates that the changing nature is being observed in rural family pattern of Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Globalization, Family relationship, Family structure, Rural Bangladesh, and Modernization.

### INTRODUCTION:

Family is a fundamental institution of a society and it is an essential part of many people's lives. Because, human interaction, relationships, and performance of various roles are consolidated through the family institution. In brief, family has great influence in shaping both individuals and the broader society (Saleem *et al.*, 2015). But in contemporary times, a new era is emerging, marked by numerous opportunities, challenges, and uncertainties. These opportunities, challenges, and uncertainties are affecting the society thoroughly (Rahman & Zhang, UniversePG | [www.universepg.com](http://www.universepg.com)

2017). All institutions in the society are changing with time and the family is no exception (Saleem *et al.*, 2015). For instance, the changes are being noticed in family structure and relationships at present (Rahman & Zhang, 2017).

Originally, the changes in family structures and relations have taken place in the Western world entirely. However, these changing trends are also stretching across the western world to the rest of the world. Regarding the family structure, most of the developed countries', especially in Western and Euro-

pean countries, family structure is nuclear and the rest of the countries' like developing countries' family structure is joint or extended (Georgas, 2003; Rahman & Zhang, 2017). Various ideologies i.e., individualism, migration, immigrant marriage, consumerist tendency, market economy, and media have a striking role behind family diversity and transformation. In Asian nations, families' conventional pattern falls owing to following Western culture. Media flows spread all over the world, which is producing programs such as drama, serials etc. that are related to Western family matters. Eastern people are the consumers of these programs that influenced them to westernize their family structure and values. Along with changing family structure, family relationships are also changing. Bondage of family has been eroding day by day, children and elderly members are facing vulnerability in their family life, and interaction with family members is reducing day-by-day (Rahman & Jhang, 2017).

The changes in family pattern in Asian countries like Bangladesh, have been focused in one study titled "Marriage in Changing Family Pattern of Bangladesh: The Present Trends" which was conducted in ten villages of Mymensingh and Sirajganj district and examined the reasons of changing family pattern, age at marriage, dowry and divorce in the family. The changes in family pattern are manifested in terms of type, size, and choices of the family. Regarding the comparison between the family size of previous and present societies, the family size in previous societies was larger than the present societies and it is a sharp indication to understand the alterations in family structure in Bangladesh. Besides, in cases of family type, significant portions (62.25%) of the respondents prefer a joint family system because of mutual cooperation, mutual love and compassion, economic solvency, security of dependent members, deposit ability, family maintenance through a small amount of money. Notwithstanding, people who live in urban parts of Bangladesh favor the nuclear family and behind the favoritism of the nuclear family, urbanization and modernization are associated closely. These changes in the family pattern of Bangladesh are made possible due to some contributing factors such as technological advancement, educational and job sector

opportunities, development of education, law and health, and empowerment. The changes and transformations in family are noticed in roles and functions of family as well. Some crucial factors, such as labor market participation, increased opportunities for education, decision-making power, and awareness about health, nutrition, etc. are responsible behind the changes in family roles and functions. Due to the changes in family structure and functions, several positive and negative effects emerged. In terms of positive effects, expansion of educational institutions, increased access to women education, employment opportunities, decision-making ability, financial security and solvency, and well-being among the members were found in the family. On the other hand, dividing joint family, complexity of family maintenance, lack of care of children, negligence towards the aged and dependent persons, and declining moral standard were found as negative effects (Samad, 2015; Parvin *et al.*, 2021).

This study attempted to analyze the family structure in contemporary rural areas of Bangladesh. This research paper explained and analyzed the family types, previous and present household authority, and family relationships of rural society. There is a lack of research on changing rural family structure in Bangladesh. For this reason, this study will provide an insight for future researchers. Additionally, this paper would be helpful for readers to understand that family patterns are changing not only in urban areas but also in rural areas as the impact of globalization and modernization have spread out everywhere. Finally, this study will provide awareness among the people so that they can properly deal with the family relationships as family is a major institution in a society and it (family) has a huge influence on the life of an individual.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

Both the qualitative and quantitative data were collected in view of the objectives set out for the study. To conduct the present study conveniently, two villages, one in Uttar Makimabad under the 4th ward of Hajiganj Pourashava and the other in Purba Kazirgaon under the 5th Hajiganj Sadar Union of Hajiganj Upzila in Chandpur district in Bangladesh, were selected for data collection. A detailed interview

schedule and checklist were prepared for conducting the field-structured interview technique used for data collection. A total of 120 respondents were interviewed through the detailed interview schedule besides, for enriching study findings, relevant data were also collected through five key informant interviews (KII) with members of the families, community leaders, and elderly people involved who have experience with change in rural areas. A study team comprising five members, including a principal researcher, worked on data collection. All researchers participated in all phases of data collection, including the KIIs, in the fields. It is important to highlight that current studies have been conducted on the Changing Family Structure in Rural Bangladesh: A Sociological Study in Chandpur District of Bangladesh based on the present and previous generations. The demarcation between the generations was initially made on the basis of time. In this case, the previous and current generations of the study were based on Bangladeshi household patterns before and after the 1980s, respectively. Therefore, the data were collected purposefully from the age group of 35 to above 65 years so that they could provide information from their observations, experiences, and memories regarding the changing patterns of their families during two generations, in particular. The introduction of advanced technology such as computers, mobile phones, and the internet, educational expansion, women's participation in job industries, rapid modernization of the agricultural sector, and migration of rural populations to urban areas all contributed to commendable changes in Bangladesh's family structure.

### **Theoretical Approach**

At the age of globalization and modernization, every element of society is changing gradually as an element of society, family is one of them. Family is a paramount institution of a society because it is able to shape the society. But the influence of family is gradually decreasing in contemporary time (Notestein, 1953; Davis, 1963; Goode, 1963). At present, internet access and technology have brought the whole world into people's hands and for this reason; people of a country are able to learn about the culture of another country regardless of borders (Inkeles & Smith, 1974 as cited in Mayer, 2013). Besides, Western culture

(Robertson, 1992; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Trommsdorff, 2009) and socio-economic development (Notestein 1953; Davis 1963; Goode 1963), are responsible behind the changes in family pattern. Due to these factors, family patterns are changing not only in Western countries but also in other developing countries. For instance, the nuclear family in Western countries is being replaced by the single-parent family and on the contrary, the extended or joint family is being replaced by the nuclear family in developing countries (Robertson, 1992). Traditional family roles and functions and interpersonal relationships are changing alongside the family structure. Consequently, individual freedom, mutual respect, self-interest, autonomy, compliance, personal choice, gender equality, and negotiation are developed in gender roles and relationships (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Moreover, weak bonding and isolation is being noticed among family members (Notestein, 1953; Davis, 1963; Goode, 1963; Robertson, 1992). So, it is obvious that the traditional family pattern characteristics are being eroded throughout the world (Robertson, 1992). Similarly, the study revealed that a considerable number of participants reside in nuclear families within the two villages of Chandpur district. The prevalence of nuclear family setups can be attributed to factors such as individualism, education, empowerment of women, access to the internet, and the presence of mill factories, all of which contribute significantly to their prominence. In the past, husbands held primary authority in household decision-making, but nowadays both husbands and wives play an active role in making decisions concerning various matters. Changing family structures and dynamics have impacted family relationships. In the past, there was a strong emphasis on family and kinship bonds, fostering collectivism and mutual cooperation. However, in modern times, family relationships are becoming more fragile, with individualism becoming increasingly prevalent within households. As a result, conflict arises, moral values are compromised, elderly members are neglected, and joint family structures break down.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**

Family is the basic social unit consisting of parents and their children who are related either to cons-

anguinity or affinity. Traditional family structure consists of husband and wife and their children but, at the age of globalization, traditional family pattern is breaking down which also causes change in family relationship type.

**Changes in Family Pattern**

In the beginning phase, globalization was economic and political services but with the time being it has been extending over the decades to socio-cultural matter, family relations, environment and even all the arena of human being (Rahman & Jhang, 2017) and family as an element of social structure has undergone significant change in the era of globalization. The changing pattern and function of family simultaneously alter the traditional family relationship which results in the growth of nuclear family by declining joint family. In this context, table 1 illustrates that 67.5% rural people in this study preferred joint families to live but 32.5% of them live in joint families. Al-Kassir, (1991) stated joint family as the older man living with his wife or wives, his unmarried children, married sons and their wives and children. They have solely biological blood relationships, religious satisfaction, instinctual love, moral integrity, self-preservation and economic needs. In this family system family members help each other economically for mutual benefits and also assure sexual gratification. Ultimately this family system ensures security, psychological support, guidance and care of

the elderly member. This study has also found that for mutual love (41.9%), co-operation (41.9%) and economic security (16.2%) rural people preferred joint families over nuclear families as well as rural people believe that joint families have strong bonding among members which enhance mutual love and understanding among family members and help each other at the time of difficulty.

Despite preferring joint families to live with the majority (67.5%) of this study live in a nuclear family which consists of only wife, husband and their children, hence, people prefer nuclear families to live with for less disturbance (67.3%) of members along with it provides privacy (20%) to the member as it consists of a few members. Nuclear families have less chaos of members which allow people to practice individuality (12.7%). Regarding the preference of nuclear families, a female stated, *at present many parents want to separate their children (sons) after their marriage to avoid disputes among siblings. Parents separate their children (sons) to make them economically independent when they will have their own responsibility, their own family and there will be concern for being self-reliant. Otherwise, if they live in a joint family there will be less concern for being self-reliant because joint families ensure financial support from other members which make them dependent on others. For the reason of getting self-dependent I prefer a nuclear family.*

**Table 1:** Family type, preferred family and reasons of preferring family.

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Type of family respondents live in</b>		
Joint Family	39	32.5%
Nuclear Family	81	67.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Preferred family type</b>		
Joint Family	81	67.5%
Nuclear Family	39	32.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Reasons of preferring joint family</b>		
Mutual love	57	41.9%
Co-operation	57	41.9%
Economic security	22	16.2%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>
<b>Reasons of preferring nuclear family</b>		
Less disturbance/ unmixed	37	67.3%

Privacy	11	20.0%
Individuality	7	12.7%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, July-September, 2023.

**Table 2** elucidates that the mark of change in family now also visible in rural area of Bangladesh that number of joint family is eroding and the structure of family is changing, in this study 94.2% rural people express that the family type is changing in rural area and now, most visible family is nuclear family (86.7%) but most of the respondents (67.5%) prefer joint family. In spite of preferring joint families, people live in nuclear families for convenience as privacy (7.4%) may be maintained in a nuclear family which is tough to maintain in a joint family. Joint family has a large number of members which causes discomfort for many and as a result people find comfort and fewer disturbances (32.5%) in the nuclear family. An individual can practice more freedom (40.5%) in a nuclear family than joint family because there is less responsibility (17.2%) in nuclear families, which present in the joint family as a consequence of nuclear family, is more visible in rural areas. Some mention women empowerment (2.5%) is the result of being a nuclear family as women agency has developed. In this regard a male person said, in that age, women have decision making power, resulting, after marriage they want to live separately and they get support and acceptance from their husband. Everyone wants to be happy in a solitary way and after marriage couples separated from family and move to the city for a better life standard and for a better future. People think they will be able to be frugal in their own way when they live separately because in a joint family, they have lots of responsibility which may pull back a person for economic development. Another female person also added in this regard that in the past people

obeyed in laws and respected their opinion and agreed to live in a joint family but nowadays after marriage couples no longer want to live in a joint family. They make their own decisions and live separately.

In this study, the Internet (12.5%), expansion of education (29.2%), women empowerment (15.5%), increasing mill factories (11.3%), and individualism (31.5%) are identified as the driving force for the changes in rural family patterns in table 2. People like to live with their own freedom without chaos and single family is an ideal place for practicing individualism and work opportunities in a mill factory pushing rural people into the city as a result people migrate to the city with their family which breaks down joint families. In Asian nations, families' conventional pattern falls because of following culture through electronic media (Rahman & Jhang, 2017). The Internet is a crucial force which influences family pattern and single family is the result of following western culture through the internet. In rural areas, families are being influenced by Indian drama through satellite television channels and nowadays the internet crucially influences individuals. In regard to the influence of the Internet a male person added that *the internet and satellite channels create opportunities to know about the world which influences our way of thinking. Rural people are now practicing individualism which they learn from the internet and it drives people to form a single family. Especially women are deeply influenced by Indian Tv channels Star Jalsha, Zee Bangla, Star plus etc. which affect family patterns.*

**Table 2:** Most visible family and reasons of visible family and changing family pattern in rural area (multiple responses).

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Most visible family</b>		
Joint family	16	13.3%
Nuclear family	104	86.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Reasons of more visible family (Nuclear family)</b>		
Privacy	12	7.4%

Less disturbance	53	32.5%
Individual freedom	66	40.5%
Less responsibility	28	17.2%
Women empowerment	4	2.5%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>
<b>Changing family pattern</b>		
Yes	113	94.2%
No	7	5.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Reasons of changing family pattern</b>		
Internet	21	12.5%
Education	49	29.2%
Women empowerment	26	15.5%
Mill factory	19	11.3%
Individualism	53	31.5%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, July-September, 2023.

Bangladesh is a patriarchal society in which male and elderly members make the majority of household decisions. However, changing family dynamics have also had an impact on household authority. **Table 3** indicates that although husbands (85.8%) made the majority of household decisions in the past, but currently, both husband and wife (67.5%) make the

majority of household decisions. Several reasons have been found in this study which changes the pattern of household authority in rural areas which includes development of communication (7.1%), internet (10.9%), women empowerment (32.1%), expansion of education (45.5%) and convenience for family (4.5%).

**Table 3:** Household authority in past and at present and factors of changing authority.

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Past household authority</b>		
Husband	103	85.8
Wife	2	1.7
Both	8	6.7
Elderly member	7	5.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>At present household authority</b>		
Husband	31	25.8
Wife	8	6.7
Both	81	67.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Changing authority</b>		
Yes	99	82.5
No	21	17.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Reasons of changing authority</b>		
Development of communication	11	7.1%
Internet	17	10.9%
Women empowerment	50	32.1%
Expansion of education	71	45.5%
Convenient for family	7	4.5%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, July-September, 2023.

### Changes in family relationship

The changing family pattern of rural areas also influences the rural family relationship where rural mechanical solidarity gradually transforms into organic solidarity because of the practice of individualism and self-interest rather than collective interest. Unity among the family members is weakening due to the breakdown of joint family and it has been found in this study (89.2%) rural people perceive that rural family relationship in the past was based on mutual cooperation, strong bond, solidarity and strong kin relation which has been replacing by fragile and weak bonding and rural people identified globalization as a major force which is the process of spreading ideas, knowledge, information, goods and services. The flow of the development of information technology and

communication has also reached the rural areas of Bangladesh which enhances the capability of the rural people to constantly connect them with the outer world. It has been found in this study the present pattern of rural family relationships consists of weak bonding (60%) among members, weak kin relation (27.9%), insecure feeling (7%), and individuality (23.3%) in **Table 4**. Young members of the family get more involved in digital devices (computer, internet, Facebook etc.) as the means of pleasure rather than interaction with parents and other family members. Social media disconnected family members from each other and it has become an addiction which creates meaningless love, friendship etc (Rahman & Jhang, 2017).

**Table 4:** Family relationship in past and at present and factors of changing family relationship (multiple responses).

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Past family relationship</b>		
Mutual cooperation	60	27.5%
Strong family relation	61	28.0%
Solidarity	27	12.4%
Strong kin relation	70	32.1%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>
<b>Changing family relationship</b>		
Yes	107	89.2
No	13	10.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Type of changing family relationship</b>		
Weak bonding	72	60%
Weak kin relation	48	27.9%
Insecure feeling	12	7.0%
Individuality	40	23.3%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, July-September, 2023.

The following table demonstrates that the changing pattern of rural family and relationship affects rural society which results breakdown of joint family (26.4%), degradation of morality (15.7%), self-centered (18.7%), lack of proper socialization 6.4%), neglect towards elderly person (17%) and conflict in conjugal life (15.7%). After marriage children get separated from their parents, sometimes they move to the city which makes children indifferent about the care of their elderly parents.

Lack of proper socialization causes moral degradation, in this response an elderly person includes, *now most of the families are single where children get less rule and socialization from adults. When children grow up with grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins they can learn sacrifice, compromise, adaptation with any circumstances, showing respect to others which help them to form morality. Sharing happiness and sorrow together creates a strong bond. It's a great concern that the morality of our teenagers is decreasing, a*

tendency of disobeying, disrespect to elders is ascending into them day by day. The way younger people used to respect the elders has now diminished.

**Table 5:** Problem generating from changing family pattern (multiple responses).

Problems due to changing family pattern	Frequency	Percentage
Breakdown of joint family	62	26.4%
Moral degradation	37	15.7%
Self-centered	44	18.7%
Lack of proper socialization	15	6.4%
Neglect towards elderly member	40	17.0%
Conflict in conjugal life	37	15.7%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, July-September, 2023.

### CONCLUSION:

Family which is a universal social institution exists in every society in different forms. The traditional rural family of Bangladesh has been changing with time where traditional joint families in rural areas are breaking down by the impact of the internet, expansion of education, women empowerment, and the mill factory. Rural people now prefer to live in a nuclear family as it provides fewer disturbances, economic security, having less responsibility and so on. A very few rural people like to live in joint families for mutual support, economic support but at the end of the day they look for peace in the nuclear family. With the pace of changing family patterns, rural family relationships have also been changing. Rural family relations in the past were based on strong unity and bonding which is weakening. The change of rural family pattern and relationship at the age of globalization offers the flexibility of nuclear family as well as it generates problems such as moral degradation, conjugal conflict etc. in rural social circumstances.

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### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The authors declare no possible conflict of interest in the present study.

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