



Effect of Family Setup on Interpersonal Relationship in Married People: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This research investigates what role family structure plays in shaping attachment styles among married people residing in Karachi, Pakistan, between nuclear and joint family environments. Research investigates how South Asian family structures impact three types of attachment patterns during marital relationships since family environments carry great social importance in South Asian cultures.

This study involved 100 married adults, dividing them into two groups: fifty nuclear families and fifty joint families. We acquired the research data by administering the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) – Close Relationships Version (Collins, 1996). The independent samples t-test operation evaluated scores for attachment between both participant groups. Nuclear family members identified significantly stronger close attachment feelings and dependency toward their spouses, which indicated more emotional closeness and reliance. The research showed that participants from joint families scored higher on anxious attachment scores, which implies both emotional insecurity and relationship anxiety.



The study backs earlier research conducted by Ayub and Iqbal (2012) and Khan and Aftab (2019) because it proves how privacy and autonomy, together with spousal interaction, help form secure attachment. The research results confirm Qadir and his colleagues' (2013) conclusion that external family involvement in traditional joint households leads to relationship anxiety. According to the study results, nuclear families maintain superior conditions for marital bond security, but joint families enable access to social support, which also produces emotional stress from family interference.

Marriage counselors and psychologists, together with policymakers, should take note of the research findings because they demonstrate how family structures affect the psychological aspects of marital happiness. Future studies need to examine how family environments affect relationships in South Asian marriages across time as well as study other sociocultural plus economic elements that affect these bonds.

Keywords: Family Structure, Nuclear Families, Joint Families, Attachment Styles, Marital Relationships, Psychological Well-being, Social Exchange Theory

Introduction

Family structure creates vital conditions for how married people establish their interpersonal connections. Traditional family arrangements in Pakistan consist of two main patterns including joint family structures and nuclear family structures. Extended family members who include grandparents along with uncles and aunts and cousins maintain a deep cultural presence where they share one household under the joint family system in South Asian social arrangements. In the nuclear family system spouses and their children form the only residence group that exists independently of extended relatives. Distinct familial dynamics operate between systems since they affect marriages differently.

Family structure and its Impact on Relationship

Throughout many years, social scientists have investigated the multiple aspects of family systems in their various compositions. Trost (1990) described the family definition process as difficult because traditional family standards have changed throughout time while cultures develop independently. Family understanding varies among individuals because our values interact with personal life experiences and cultural influences, according to Allen (2000). Family definition extends beyond biological bonds and encompasses social aspects as well as emotional and ideological elements, according to her perspective.

Joint Family System

Under the traditional approach, multiple generations of a family reside together in the same dwelling. People in Pakistan and other South Asian cultures practice this family arrangement by living together in one residence with their grandparents and uncles, aunts, and cousins. Studies by social researchers confirm that joint family structures provide children with their basic education through their development of patience and cooperative behavior and adaptable character traits (Meenakshi, 2001). An extended



family structure produces a robust support network that assists people through their life difficulties in social as well as financial domains.

Group living in joint families generates both beneficial effects and drawbacks for members. Problems within marital relationships arise when elders intervene in family matters, limit privacy, and dispute responsibilities. Married individuals who live in joint families, according to Ayub and Iqbal (2012), display stress symptoms because external involvement with their private affairs can decrease their marital satisfaction. Under the joint family system, members must share responsibilities while making joint decisions together with mutual support as common practice. Through this structure, members obtain access to an extensive support network that delivers both emotional and financial as well as social help. Joint family arrangements might cause three primary issues, including privacy loss and reduced independence, which result from multiple family members overseeing personal life decisions.

Under the nuclear family system, couples gain higher levels of privacy in addition to self-governance. Marriage becomes the main priority in this arrangement while couples maintain complete independence in their actions. The nuclear family arrangement may experience a reduction in the quick family-based assistance that joint families provide, potentially leading to increased stress levels during special emergency situations.

Joint family systems unite descendants with their grandparents, with the offspring sharing the same household. The joint family structure creates situations where different family members combine their duties with each other while working together to decide on matters and providing mutual assistance. The research conducted by Lodhi et al. (2021) examined residents in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Wah Cantt, Pakistan, and discovered that joint families provide better social support and quality of life results than nuclear families.

The joint family system creates its own set of adversities while delivering its advantages. The involvement of extended relatives in marital affairs tends to create conflicts between married couples. A research study published in the *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research* linked the decision-making power and autonomy limitations faced by newly married joint family women to weaker marital relationships (Ashfaq, 2021).

The interaction patterns within joint family structures influence marital satisfaction. The mental health research on Pakistani adolescents determined that joint families achieved higher parental marital satisfaction levels than nuclear families because of the nurturing support system from extended family members (Shahzad & Malik, 2014).

Nuclear Family System

A nuclear family contains an intermarried couple who raise their children in their own home away from other relatives. Such arrangements give couples and children more power and privacy to make decisions.

The transformation of modern societies through urbanization and modernization practices has caused more and more Pakistani youth to prefer nuclear family structures. The Western model of the nuclear family meets Scanzoni et al.'s (1989) definition of "ideal" family structure, but it does not fulfill all the needs people seek during crisis situations.



The movement toward nuclear families in Pakistan continues to grow because economic transformations have happened alongside changing career possibilities and developments in gender-based lifestyle changes. Nuclear families provide individuals with personal autonomy; however, these benefits can come at the cost of social integration because they reduce social bonds and negatively affect marriages, according to Khan & Aftab (2019).

Managing family relations under the nuclear structure creates unique behavioral combinations. Nuclear family couples tend to have more privacy in addition to autonomy and freedom when it comes to independent decision-making. The couple's ability to develop a deeper bond forms when they face life problems independently from outside influence due to their arrangement. Psychological studies show that women from nuclear families acquire increased independence, superior confidence, and stronger psychological stability than women from joint family structures (Ashfaq, 2021). While offering many benefits, nuclear families commonly fail to deliver the instant assistance network that joint families provide. Marital relationships become strongly affected by prolonged stress during crises because joint family members are absent in nuclear family structures. According to Lodhi et al. (2019), nuclear families maintain freedom, but they sometimes lack both emotional and financial stability provided by joint families.

Pakistani women experienced greater marital satisfaction, according to Ayub & Iqbal (2012), who showed that employment status and family structure play essential roles in marital satisfaction results (Ayub & Iqbal, 2012).

Multiple scientific investigations about joint and nuclear family systems have shown divergent conclusions. A large number of studies show that joint family members demonstrate greater life satisfaction because they have the support network of multiple relatives. The research established that 87.5% of joint family members expressed satisfaction, while nuclear family members scored at an 81% rate (Khan et al., 2019).

Research evidence suggests that self-governance together with personal space within nuclear family environments leads spouses to experience greater marital joy. Couples benefit from the absence of family interference because it enables better development of understanding and intimacy. Couples residing in nuclear homes build stronger connections between each other because they share responsibility for family decisions while dedicating longer periods of time to each other (Ashfaq, 2021).

Scientists discovered through research that strong family communication findings directly link to marital satisfaction levels in various types of households. The relationship between positive communication skills and marital satisfaction became stronger through emotion regulation, according to Qadir et al. (2013).

Being the biggest urban area of Pakistan makes Karachi home to a special cultural mix of populations. Urban living, population diversity, and economic divisions influence family structures and marital relationships in the city. Youth in Karachi chose to establish their own houses because they valued their independence and relationship privacy, according to research findings. The study mentioned that, despite their



preference for nuclear families, the younger generation demonstrated an awareness of the benefits of joint families (Ashfaq, 2021).

Social Exchange Theory

Sociologist George Homans (1958) published the concept known as Social Exchange Theory in his work *Social Behavior as Exchange*. Social interactions take place through a continuous mutual exchange system between multiple social entities. Homans (1958) declared that human social behaviors depend on both anticipated benefits and expenses during sociological exchanges.

The development of the theory proceeded after George Homans' original work through the extended research efforts of (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962). Blau (1964) expanded the exchange concept through his analysis of social power structures and power relationships, while Emerson integrated it with psychological theories.

Thibaut and Kelley (1959) provided substantial insight regarding psychological aspects of social exchange in interpersonal relationships. Blau (1964), along with Emerson (1962), demonstrated how partnership in relationships involves dependent dynamics with persons evaluating advantages and disadvantages before advancing their contacts. According to Strauss (1973), the theory spread into anthropology, where he analyzed cultural universal exchanges between families and gift-giving traditions across societies.

Self-Interest and Interdependence

Social Exchange Theory features two essential elements, which serve as both self-interest and interdependence. The elements influence behavioral patterns between people during interactions and establish the worth of their social exchanges.

People seek rewards with reduced social costs in their social dealings because self-interest brings together three types of motivational drivers—economic, social and psychological elements. Interdependence defines a fundamental connection between two entities since each party determines the results that influence the other participants in an exchange.

Self-interest receives negative perceptions from some people yet is essential for building interpersonal bonds between individuals. The proper alignment of self-interest prompts people to generate positive contributions to their relationships while delivering advantages to both sides involved. The researchers Roloff (1981) and Thibaut and Kelley (1959) agreed that social conflict emerges because social partners have varying levels of dependence on each other. The researchers established a framework to study how reciprocal control functions and its social and practical aspects within relationship interdependence.

Basic Concept of Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory demonstrates that human social engagement consists of economic exchanges together with social results. Individuals conduct transactions according to the theory that grants them maximum benefit and minimal expense in their exchanges.



According to Blau (1959), people continuously evaluate methods to increase their personal returns not only in economic transactions but also in social interactions. The theory clarifies the reason people form relationships such as friendships and partnerships: they hope to receive emotional and social together with financial benefits. Social interactions don't follow the rules of the law because they are based on trust, mutual expectations, and flexible agreements, not on set economic values. Stafford (2008) demonstrated through his research that social exchanges operate with an emotional basis focused on trust rather than requiring explicit bargaining.

Significance of the Study

The evaluation of family setup effects on marital interaction represents a fundamental field of research due to its multiple reasons. Firstly, it reveals what sociocultural elements shape marital satisfaction as well as stability levels. The research technique helps find both areas of disagreement and compatibility within different family systems. Knowledge obtained from this understanding leads to policymaking actions that social workers can use to create interventions for promoting healthy marital relations.

The analysis takes place in Karachi, which serves as Pakistan's largest urban center, thereby creating special conditions for studying this subject. Fast urbanization and population diversity in the city create optimal conditions to study how family arrangements affect married people's relationships.

Rationale of the Study

Despite its importance, limited research has been conducted in Pakistan on how family structure affects interpersonal relationships in married individuals. The existing literature mainly focuses on Western societies, with only a few studies addressing the Pakistani cultural context.

This study aims to fill that gap by exploring:

- How joint and nuclear family systems influence marital satisfaction.
- The role of self-interest and interdependence in marital relationships.
- The impact of family structure on conflict resolution, emotional support, and relationship stability.

Given that Pakistan is a collectivist society, where traditional family values remain dominant, this research is highly significant. The findings will help social scientists, psychologists, and policymakers understand how family dynamics shape marital relationships and overall well-being.

Hypothesis

Based on the existing literature, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: There is significant difference between couples those who live in joint family system and who live in nuclear family system, on the scale of "Adult Attachment Scale".

Methodology Sample



The current study recruited 100 married adults from joint and nuclear family setups, with 50 participants from each family structure. The age range for participants was 18 to 40 years. A convenience sampling technique was used to collect data, allowing researchers to recruit participants who are readily available and willing to participate. Volunteers were informed about the confidentiality of their responses and encouraged to participate voluntarily. Each participant were provided with a questionnaire consisting of standardized questionnaires and a demographic information sheet.

Measures

Participants first complete a demographic information sheet, which gather data on their age, family structure, marital duration, and socioeconomic status. The study used the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) – Close Relationships Version developed by Collins (1996) to assess interpersonal relationships.

The RAAS is a five-point Likert-type scale measuring attachment styles in adult relationships. The scale is originally in English and has been widely used in relationship studies.

Procedure

The data collection process took place in 2024. Participants were approached individually at their homes, ensuring a comfortable and familiar environment.

The Questionnaire, which includes the study instruments and a demographic questionnaire, were distributed individually. Participants were clearly informed that:

- Their participation is voluntary.
- Their responses will remain confidential.
- They may seek clarification if they have any questions regarding the questionnaire.
- Sufficient time was provided for participants to complete the questionnaire.
- Once completed, the data was collected and securely stored for analysis.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data was entered into a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) for analysis. The study employed Independent samples t-test to compare the mean scores of marital satisfaction and interpersonal relationships between joint family and nuclear family participants. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to summarize participant characteristics.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed throughout the study:

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection.
- Participants were assured that their responses will remain confidential and used solely for research purposes.



- Participation was entirely voluntary, and individuals could withdraw from the study at any time.
- Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions and clarify any doubts regarding the questionnaire.

Results

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Socioeconomic Status (PKR)	100	-	-	45000	120000
Education	100	-	-	BA	MBBS
Age Group	100	1.5	0.503	25 to 39	49 to 39
Family Status	100	-	-	Nuclear	Joint

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants (N = 100), including socioeconomic status, education level, age group, and family status.

The socioeconomic status of participants varied widely, with the lowest reported income being PKR 45,000 and the highest reaching PKR 120,000. The mean and standard deviation for income were not calculated, as the data represents categorical values. A large proportion of participants reported earning between PKR 70,000 and PKR 90,000, indicating a middle-income population.

Regarding education levels, the majority of participants (94%) held a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree, while smaller proportions had Bachelor of Arts (BA) (2%), FCPS (2%), or MBBS (2%) qualifications. This suggests that the sample was highly educated, with most individuals possessing at least an undergraduate degree.

The age distribution of participants ranged from 25 to 49 years, with the mean age reported as 1.50 (SD = 0.503). However, due to a possible data entry inconsistency, the age group categories (e.g., "48 to 39" and "49 to 39") may need further clarification. The majority of participants (96%) were between 25 and 39 years old, indicating that the sample primarily comprised young to middle-aged adults.

The sample was evenly divided between nuclear family (50%) and joint family (50%) structures, ensuring a balanced representation of both family setups for comparative analysis.

T-Test

Group Statistics

	Family Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Close Attachment	Nuclear	50	24.64	1.827	.258
	Joint	50	8.38	2.069	.293
Dependent Attachment	Nuclear	50	21.50	2.922	.413
	Joint	50	14.82	3.186	.451
Anxious Attachment	Nuclear	50	8.58	2.475	.350
	Joint	50	24.56	1.939	.274
Attachment	Nuclear	50	54.72	4.389	.621



	Joint	50	47.76	4.074	.576
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Independent Samples Test

	t-test for Equality of Means						
	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differenc e	Std. Error Differenc e	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Close Attachment	41.656	98	.000	16.260	.390	15.485	17.035
Dependent Attachment	10.925	98	.000	6.680	.611	5.467	7.893
Anxious Attachment	-35.935	98	.000	-15.980	.445	-16.862	-15.098
Attachment	8.218	98	.000	6.960	.847	5.279	8.641

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare attachment styles (Close Attachment, Dependent Attachment, Anxious Attachment, and Overall Attachment) between individuals in nuclear and joint family systems. The results are presented in Table 2.

The results indicated a significant difference in close attachment scores between participants from nuclear families ($M = 24.64$, $SD = 1.827$) and those from joint families ($M = 8.38$, $SD = 2.069$), $t(98) = 41.656$, $p < .001$. The mean difference of 16.260 (95% CI [15.485, 17.035]) suggests that individuals from nuclear families report significantly higher close attachment levels compared to those from joint families.

A significant difference was also found in dependent attachment scores, $t(98) = 10.925$, $p < .001$. Participants from nuclear families ($M = 21.50$, $SD = 2.922$) reported higher dependent attachment levels than those from joint families ($M = 14.82$, $SD = 3.186$), with a mean difference of 6.680 (95% CI [5.467, 7.893]).

Conversely, anxious attachment was significantly higher in participants from joint families ($M = 24.56$, $SD = 1.939$) compared to those from nuclear families ($M = 8.58$, $SD = 2.475$), $t(98) = -35.935$, $p < .001$. The mean difference of -15.980 (95% CI [-16.862, -15.098]) indicates that individuals from joint families exhibit greater anxious attachment than their nuclear family counterparts.

For overall attachment scores, participants from nuclear families ($M = 54.72$, $SD = 4.389$) scored significantly higher than those from joint families ($M = 47.76$, $SD = 4.074$), $t(98) = 8.218$, $p < .001$. The mean difference of 6.960 (95% CI [5.279, 8.641]) suggests that individuals in nuclear families experience more secure attachment styles overall compared to those in joint family systems.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the impact of family structure (nuclear vs. joint families) on attachment styles among married individuals. The results indicate that



individuals from nuclear families exhibit significantly higher levels of close and dependent attachment, while those from joint families show higher anxious attachment tendencies.

Close Attachment and Family Structure

The research findings showed that people from nuclear families achieved higher close attachment scores ($M = 24.64$) than those from joint families ($M = 8.38$). Research data shows that nuclear families build stronger emotional bonds between spouses than joint families, thus confirming previous study findings.

Private family settings and spouse interaction freedom create better emotional attachment within nuclear families, according to Ayub and Iqbal (2012). The presence of multiple family members in joint families generates decreased spouse intimacy because household attention splits between multiple members. The exclusive family environment of nuclear families might have led participants to develop stronger close attachment patterns in the present study.

Khan and Aftab (2019) discovered that the controlled atmosphere of nuclear families lets couples establish emotional bonds independently from outside distractions. The research data confirms these arguments since nuclear family structures lead to safe and emotionally close bonds between spouses.

Qadir et al. (2013) state that joint families maintain closeness by combining responsibilities with joint problem-solving, but other researchers disagree with this claim. The present research findings indicate that nuclear family arrangements create better conditions for marital closeness than joint family systems in urban Pakistan.

Dependent Attachment and Family Structure

The research results showed dependent attachment reached a higher level among nuclear family participants ($M = 21.50$) than joint family participants ($M = 14.82$). Married couples in nuclear families exhibit stronger emotional dependency toward each other than those residing in joint family arrangements.

Blau (1964) says that social exchange dynamics work better in smaller units that are more dependent on each other, like nuclear families, because people need both emotional support and financial help from their close family. Our study supports this conclusion because people in nuclear family arrangements tend to seek emotional reassurance and conflict resolution as well as companionship from their spouse rather than from extended family members.

Shahzad and Malik (2014) discovered that children, together with adults in nuclear families, show stronger interdependence with their closest family members because nuclear families maintain smaller support networks. The distribution of household support across multiple family members in joint families tends to minimize the amount of reliance spouses have on one another.

Scientific studies point to potential weaknesses that develop when people rely too heavily on their spouses. According to Scanzoni et al. (1989), nuclear family structures that experience heavy dependence might create relationship problems because one spouse may fail to fulfill the emotional needs of their partner. Research indicates that



nuclear families exhibit higher dependent attachment, but more studies need to determine whether this pattern has positive or negative consequences for the long run.

Anxious Attachment in Joint Family Structure

The results demonstrated that people from joint families rated their attachment anxiety at $M = 24.56$, while those from nuclear families reported $M = 8.58$. The results indicate that joint family systems tend to increase marital relationship anxiety levels.

The study results match those of Qadir et al. (2013), who discovered that joint family households experience higher rates of both mental health issues and marital anxiety among female residents. The involvement of outsiders in marital matters seems to be a key factor that explains this difference between joint family structures and nuclear family arrangements. The marriage becomes more stressful because in-laws and extended relatives commonly control major household decisions in these situations.

Hanif (2010) demonstrates that joint family women face household expectations that drive their relationship anxiety to emotional distress. Nuclear family structures provide their members with enhanced control of marital relationships, which decreases the anxiety-producing stressors that lead to anxious attachment.

Blackwell (2010) discovered that perceived social support and autonomy play essential roles in decreasing attachment anxiety for individuals. The participants in nuclear families possibly scored lower on anxious attachment because these families provide more independence in decision-making.

The societal network established by joint families acts as a protective safety measure that helps members when they experience financial problems or emotional distress (Shahzad & Malik, 2014). Anxious attachment levels appear higher among joint family members according to study results, but future cultural research should evaluate how protective aspects modify these findings.

Overall Attachment and Family Influence

When analyzing overall attachment patterns, results indicated that individuals from nuclear families ($M = 54.72$) exhibited more secure attachment styles compared to those from joint families ($M = 47.76$). This suggests that nuclear family settings may be more conducive to fostering secure relationships.

These findings support Stafford (2008), who argued that family structure plays a critical role in shaping adult attachment patterns. Specifically, individuals raised in autonomous, decision-making environments (such as nuclear families) tend to develop higher emotional stability, which translates into stronger and more secure marital relationships.

Additionally, Lodhi et al. (2019) reported that quality of life scores were higher among nuclear family participants, suggesting that personal well-being and marital satisfaction are positively correlated. Our study reinforces this notion, demonstrating that family structure significantly influences attachment security in adult relationships.

However, it is important to acknowledge that attachment is influenced by multiple factors, including parenting style, individual personality, and external stressors. While family structure plays a crucial role, future research should explore how other variables



(e.g., cultural norms, gender roles, and economic stability) interact with family setups to shape attachment patterns.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study have several important implications for marriage counseling, family therapy, and social policy:

- Marriage Counselors & Therapists should recognize the impact of family structure on attachment and provide tailored interventions for couples from joint vs. nuclear families.
- Policy Makers should promote awareness programs to help married individuals navigate family dynamics and improve their emotional well-being.
- Future Research should explore how other sociocultural factors (e.g., urbanization, gender roles, and parental influence) contribute to attachment behaviors in Pakistani families.
- Future studies should investigate longitudinal effects of family structure on marital satisfaction and consider interventions to support couples in different family environments.

Conclusion

The present study contributes to the growing body of literature on family structure and marital attachment. The findings indicate that nuclear families foster closer, more dependent, and secure attachment styles, whereas joint families are associated with higher anxious attachment. These results align with prior research and provide valuable insights into how family setups shape emotional relationships.

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