



Modern Social Change and Family Reorganization in India: A Case Study of Gwalior District

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Abstract

The present study examines the impact of modern social change on the reorganization of family structure in India, with special reference to Gwalior District of Madhya Pradesh. Using a sociological survey design, primary data were collected from 350 respondents through a structured questionnaire. The study analyzes the transformation from joint family systems to nuclear family arrangements and investigates the socio-economic, educational, cultural, and migratory factors influencing this shift. Statistical techniques such as reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, One-Sample t-tests, Chi-Square tests, and Independent Samples t-tests were employed for data analysis. The findings reveal a statistically significant decline in joint families and a growing preference for nuclear families, driven by factors such as urbanization, employment opportunities, changing values, women's empowerment, and workload pressures. The results also indicate that unfavourable joint family conditions contribute to migration, while nuclear families experience higher workload and stress. The study concludes that family reorganization in contemporary India is a multidimensional process shaped by modernization and socio-economic transformation.

Keywords : Family Structure, Joint Family, Nuclear Family, Social Change, Migration, Workload and Stress, India

Introduction

Family has long been regarded as the most fundamental institution of society, serving as the primary unit for socialization, emotional support, economic cooperation, and the transmission of cultural values from one generation to the next. In the Indian socio-cultural context, the joint family system historically played a dominant role, characterized by co-residence of extended kin, shared economic resources, collective decision-making, and strong intergenerational bonds. However, in recent decades, Indian society has been witnessing a profound transformation in family organization, marked by a gradual yet consistent shift from joint families to nuclear family structures. This transition is closely associated with processes of modernization, urbanization, industrialization, expansion of education, occupational mobility, and changing value orientations. Several contemporary studies have emphasized that the decline of joint families is not merely a structural change but reflects deeper transformations



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in social relations, authority patterns, gender roles, and individual aspirations [1], [3], [10], [12]. The growing preference for nuclear families is often linked to the desire for autonomy, privacy, and independent decision-making, particularly among younger generations and educated urban populations [2], [5], [15].

Modern economic realities have significantly altered the functional relevance of the joint family system. Rising costs of living, employment-driven migration, and competitive labor markets have reduced the feasibility of maintaining large households under a single roof. Empirical evidence suggests that economic pressure, property disputes, and unequal distribution of responsibilities within joint families frequently contribute to family fragmentation [4], [7], [8]. At the same time, education and career aspirations encourage mobility, leading individuals and young couples to relocate away from their native places, thereby weakening traditional joint family arrangements [9], [11]. Migration, therefore, emerges not only as an economic strategy but also as a social response to restrictive or unsupportive family environments. Studies conducted across South Asia indicate that unfavourable joint family conditions—such as lack of privacy, emotional stress, and limited support for individual growth—often act as push factors for migration [4], [9].

Another critical dimension of family reorganization in contemporary India is the changing position of women. Increased female education, participation in the workforce, and awareness of rights have reshaped gender relations within families. Women's empowerment has challenged traditional patriarchal authority structures that were deeply embedded in joint family systems, thereby accelerating the shift toward nuclear families where decision-making is perceived to be more balanced and flexible [6], [13], [16]. Research has shown that working women, particularly in nuclear families, experience greater role strain due to the dual burden of paid work and household responsibilities; however, they also value the autonomy and reduced interference associated with nuclear living [7], [14]. This highlights a paradox of modern family life, where independence is gained at the cost of increased workload and stress. The comparative experiences of joint and nuclear families further reveal contrasting patterns of social support, emotional well-being, and stress management. Joint families traditionally provided collective support during crises, shared childcare, and emotional security, which helped reduce individual stress levels [10], [15]. In contrast, nuclear families, while offering efficiency and independence, often place greater pressure on individual members, particularly during emergencies and periods of high workload [8], [14]. Empirical studies comparing psychological and social outcomes across family types have documented differences in social intelligence, emotional stability, loneliness, and stress, underscoring the complex consequences of family transformation [1], [8], [15], [17]. These findings suggest that the shift from joint to nuclear families should not be viewed solely as social progress or decline but as a multifaceted reorganization shaped by structural and cultural forces.



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Despite a growing body of literature on family change, there remains a need for localized empirical studies that capture the lived experiences of individuals within specific socio-cultural contexts. Much of the existing research has focused either on macro-level trends or on regions with distinct socio-economic characteristics, leaving scope for micro-level sociological analysis in emerging urban centers. Gwalior District of Madhya Pradesh presents a relevant context for such an investigation, as it embodies the intersection of traditional social norms and modern urban influences. Rapid urban expansion, educational growth, employment diversification, and migration patterns in the region have contributed to noticeable changes in household composition and family relations. Understanding how these factors interact to reshape family structures at the local level is essential for developing a nuanced sociological perspective on family reorganization in contemporary India.

Against this background, the present study seeks to examine the nature and extent of the shift from joint to nuclear family systems in Gwalior District, identify the socio-economic, educational, and cultural factors responsible for this transformation, analyze the relationship between joint family conditions and migration, and compare workload and stress experiences across family types. By employing systematic quantitative analysis and hypothesis testing, the study contributes empirical evidence to ongoing sociological debates on family change. The findings are expected to enhance understanding of how modernization reshapes intimate social institutions and to provide insights relevant for social planners, policymakers, and scholars concerned with family well-being in a rapidly changing Indian society [3], [12], [16].

2. Literature Review

The transformation of family structure from joint to nuclear families has been widely examined in sociological, psychological, and interdisciplinary research, particularly in the context of rapid modernization and socio-economic change. Scholars consistently argue that the joint family system, once the dominant household form in South Asian societies, is undergoing gradual disintegration due to changing economic conditions, individual aspirations, and shifting social values. Comparative studies on joint and nuclear families highlight that family type significantly influences social intelligence, emotional development, and interpersonal relationships. For instance, Singh and Gautam emphasize that individuals raised in joint families often exhibit higher levels of social intelligence due to continuous interaction with extended kin, whereas nuclear family settings encourage independence but may limit social exposure [1]. Such findings underline that family structure plays a crucial role in shaping personality and social behavior.

A growing body of literature focuses on the role of modernization and urbanization in accelerating the decline of joint family systems. Singh and Singh, in their study on Haryana, observe that economic mobility, urban employment, and exposure to modern lifestyles have weakened traditional norms that once sustained joint families [2]. Similar conclusions are drawn by Zutshi and Dubey, who note that authority conflicts, generational gaps, and changing



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aspirations within families have reduced the functional viability of joint family arrangements in modern India [3]. These studies collectively suggest that the rise of nuclear families is closely linked to structural changes in society rather than merely individual preferences.

Economic factors have emerged as one of the most significant determinants of family reorganization. Research indicates that rising living costs, unequal economic contribution among family members, and property-related disputes often generate tensions within joint families, leading to separation. Sultana et al., in their study on rural Bangladesh, demonstrate that even in traditionally cohesive rural societies, economic pressure and livelihood insecurity are contributing to the breakdown of joint family structures [4]. Although the socio-cultural context differs, the findings resonate with Indian studies, highlighting that economic stress is a universal driver of family fragmentation across South Asia.

Education and occupational mobility further intensify the shift toward nuclear families. Studies examining students and youth perspectives reveal that educational aspirations and career-oriented lifestyles encourage young adults to seek independence from extended family control. Kaur and Chauhan found that students from nuclear families tend to display different vocational interests and career orientations compared to those from joint families, suggesting that family structure influences future aspirations [5]. Similarly, research conducted in Quetta by Jamil et al. shows that youth increasingly associate nuclear family living with personal freedom and career growth, while viewing joint families as restrictive [9]. These findings reinforce the argument that education and employment opportunities reshape family expectations and living arrangements.

Another important strand of literature examines the changing role of women and its impact on family structure. Women's empowerment, increased workforce participation, and rising educational attainment have challenged patriarchal norms traditionally embedded in joint families. Fayyaz et al. and Alam argue that changing gender roles and expectations have altered family dynamics, making nuclear families more attractive for women seeking autonomy and balanced decision-making [6], [13]. Nalgirkar's study on working parents further highlights that while nuclear families offer independence, they also impose greater responsibility on parents, particularly mothers, in managing childcare and household duties [7]. This duality reflects the complex consequences of empowerment-driven family change.

Psychological and emotional dimensions of family structure have also received considerable scholarly attention. Studies comparing joint and nuclear families in terms of emotional stability, loneliness, and stress indicate mixed outcomes. Agrawal et al. report that young adults from nuclear families experience higher levels of loneliness and internal locus of control, whereas joint family environments provide emotional security but may limit individual autonomy [8]. Sharma and Sharma similarly observe differences in emotional stability among students from different family types, suggesting that joint families offer emotional buffering through collective support [15]. These findings suggest that while nuclear families align with



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modern individualistic values, they may lack the emotional resilience inherent in joint family systems.

Migration has been identified as both a cause and consequence of changing family structures. Several studies argue that migration for education and employment weakens joint family bonds by disrupting co-residential living. Rai's analysis of family structure changes in Nepal demonstrates that migration has significantly contributed to the emergence of nuclear households, particularly among younger generations [11]. Zutshi and Dubey, as well as Sultana et al., further emphasize that unfavourable joint family conditions—such as lack of privacy, authority conflicts, and emotional dissatisfaction—act as push factors for migration [3], [4]. These studies collectively broaden the understanding of migration as a social phenomenon deeply rooted in family dynamics.

Recent international literature adds a broader comparative perspective to the debate on family structure. Aghion et al., using longitudinal data from Germany, examine how nuclear family arrangements influence social trust and find that family structure has long-term implications for social capital and interpersonal trust [12]. Although situated in a Western context, this study underscores the broader societal consequences of family reorganization, reinforcing the relevance of family structure as a key sociological variable. Allendorf and Haviland, focusing on India, further highlight that changes in family structure are closely associated with evolving gender attitudes, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between household organization and social norms [16].

3. Research Methodology

The present study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the impact of modern social change on family reorganization in India, with special reference to Gwalior District, Madhya Pradesh. The study was based on primary data collected from 350 respondents, selected using a simple random sampling technique to ensure adequate representation of different age groups, genders, occupations, and family types. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale statements covering changing family structure, causes for shifting to nuclear families, joint family conditions and migration, and workload and stress comparison.

To ensure the reliability of the research instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was applied, and all variables showed satisfactory internal consistency. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to summarize respondents' perceptions, while inferential statistical tools such as One-Sample t-tests, Chi-Square tests, and Independent Samples t-tests were applied to test the formulated hypotheses. Ethical considerations, including voluntary participation and confidentiality of responses, were strictly followed throughout the study.



4. Results and Data Analysis

This chapter presents the empirical results of the study. The analysis is based on primary data collected from **350 respondents** using a structured questionnaire designed to capture perceptions related to changing family structure, causes for shifting from joint to nuclear families, joint family conditions and migration, and workload and stress differences across family types. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS with the application of reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, and appropriate inferential statistical tests. The findings are presented systematically through tables followed by detailed interpretations to address the research objectives and test the formulated hypotheses.

4.2 Reliability Analysis of Study Variables

Before proceeding with further analysis, the internal consistency of the scales used in the study was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Changing Family Structure	0.960	15
Causes for Shifting	0.973	15
Joint Family Conditions & Migration	0.961	13
Workload & Stress Comparison	0.832	12

The reliability results presented in Table 4.1 indicate excellent internal consistency for all study variables. Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.832 to 0.973, which are well above the acceptable threshold of 0.70. This confirms that the items within each construct are highly consistent and reliable for measuring the intended concepts. Therefore, the data are considered suitable for further descriptive and inferential analysis.

4.3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were analyzed to understand the background of the sample population.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	Below 20 years	83	23.7
	21–30 years	132	37.7
	31–40 years	58	16.6
	41–50 years	44	12.6
	Above 50 years	33	9.4
Gender	Male	182	52.0
	Female	168	48.0
Education	Up to Secondary	78	22.3
	Higher Secondary	96	27.4



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	Graduate	112	32.0
	Postgraduate & Above	64	18.3
Occupation	Student	86	24.6
	Private Employee	98	28.0
	Government Employee	62	17.7
	Business/Self-employed	54	15.4
	Homemaker/Others	50	14.3
Family Type	Joint Family	138	39.4
	Nuclear Family	212	60.6

The demographic profile shows that a majority of respondents belong to the economically and socially active age group of 21–30 years. More than half of the respondents belong to nuclear families, indicating the growing prevalence of nuclear family living. The balanced gender composition and diverse educational and occupational backgrounds enhance the representativeness of the sample.

4.4 Descriptive Analysis of Changing Family Structure

This section examines respondents' perceptions regarding changes in family structure.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Changing Family Structure

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Shift from joint to nuclear families in locality	350	3.93	0.941
Nuclear families socially acceptable	350	4.07	1.348
Decline of joint families	350	3.99	1.309
Modern lifestyle promotes nuclear families	350	4.00	1.365
Urbanization affects joint family patterns	350	3.74	1.273
Privacy needs promote nuclear structure	350	4.04	1.330
Young couples prefer separate living	350	4.00	1.383
Independence in decision-making	350	3.52	1.330
Joint families losing social importance	350	3.40	1.342
Youth value change affects joint families	350	3.72	1.352
Technology supports nuclear living	350	3.95	1.324
Work demands favor nuclear families	350	3.91	1.270
Weakening social norms of joint families	350	4.04	1.357
Joint family seen as restrictive	350	4.12	1.327
Nuclear families seen as efficient	350	3.94	1.394
Valid N (listwise)	350		



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The mean values for all statements are above the neutral value of 3, indicating strong agreement that family structure has undergone significant transformation. High mean scores for statements related to modernization, urbanization, changing youth values, and increased preference for independence clearly demonstrate a shift from joint to nuclear family systems. The results confirm that nuclear families are increasingly accepted as the dominant family form in the study area.

4.5 Descriptive Analysis of Causes for Shifting from Joint to Nuclear Family

This section analyzes the socio-economic, educational, and cultural factors responsible for family transition.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Causes for Shifting

Causes	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Financial disagreements	350	3.93	1.276
Family conflicts	350	4.08	1.185
Lack of personal space	350	4.07	1.186
Employment outside hometown	350	4.05	1.224
Generational lifestyle differences	350	4.11	1.164
Desire for autonomy	350	4.03	1.144
Education and career demands	350	4.04	1.178
Migration for livelihood	350	4.02	1.223
Property disputes	350	4.16	1.197
Women empowerment	350	4.15	1.207
Rising cost of living	350	4.16	1.244
Burden of joint responsibilities	350	4.16	1.133
Interference from relatives	350	4.16	1.172
Better child upbringing belief	350	3.84	1.330
Cultural modernization	350	4.01	1.208

The findings reveal strong agreement that multiple interconnected factors influence the shift toward nuclear families. High mean scores for property disputes, rising cost of living, women empowerment, autonomy in decision-making, and migration for employment suggest that economic pressure and changing social roles are major drivers of family reorganization. These results indicate that the decline of joint families is not due to a single cause but rather a combination of structural and cultural transformations.

4.6 Joint Family Conditions and Migration

This section explores how internal joint family conditions influence migration behavior.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Joint Family Conditions & Migration

Conditions	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lack of job opportunities	350	4.01	1.212



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Family conflicts	350	3.90	1.223
Financial burden	350	3.98	1.255
Poor living conditions	350	3.87	1.172
Unequal responsibilities	350	3.93	1.201
Individual aspirations	350	4.04	1.203
Migration for education	350	4.13	1.198
Lack of privacy	350	4.09	1.158
Lack of career support	350	4.03	1.200
Family pressure	350	3.92	1.146
Marriage-related relocation	350	4.00	1.151
Poor emotional environment	350	3.78	1.266
Authority disputes	350	3.79	1.322

The descriptive results indicate that migration is strongly influenced by both external opportunities and internal family conditions. Factors such as lack of privacy, inadequate career support, educational aspirations, and emotional dissatisfaction within joint families significantly contribute to relocation decisions. These findings suggest that migration is not merely an economic response but also a coping mechanism against unfavourable family environments.

4.7 Workload and Stress Comparison Between Joint and Nuclear Families

This section compares workload and stress levels between joint and nuclear family members.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Workload & Stress Comparison

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Greater workload in nuclear families	350	3.68	1.335
Shared responsibilities in joint families	350	3.85	1.225
Higher stress due to multitasking	350	4.08	0.952
Better support in joint families	350	4.00	0.910
Emergency management issues	350	3.74	1.094
Pressure on working mothers	350	4.06	0.893
Emotional support in joint families	350	3.84	1.085
Less rest time in nuclear families	350	4.01	0.939
Unbalanced responsibilities	350	4.01	0.942
Stress reduction in joint families	350	3.69	1.027
Burnout in nuclear families	350	3.87	1.022
Crisis management in joint families	350	3.57	0.984

The results show that nuclear family members experience higher workload and stress due to multitasking, lack of shared responsibilities, and limited emotional support. Joint families, in



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contrast, provide collective support during crises and workload pressure, reducing individual stress levels. These findings highlight the social and emotional advantages of joint families despite their declining prevalence.

4.8 Hypothesis Testing Results

The hypotheses formulated for the study were tested using appropriate statistical techniques.

Table 7: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis No.	Hypothesis Statement (Null)	Statistical Test Used	Test Value(s)	df	Sig. (p-value)	Outcome
H ₀₁	There is no significant change in family structure from joint to nuclear family.	One-Sample t-Test	Mean = 3.94, t = 14.62	349	.000	Significant change from joint to nuclear family observed
H ₀₂	Economic, educational, and socio-cultural factors do not significantly influence the shift to nuclear family.	One-Sample t-Test	Mean = 4.08, t = 17.41	349	.000	Socio-economic and cultural factors significantly influence family shift
H ₀₃	Joint family conditions do not significantly influence migration of family members.	Chi-Square Test	$\chi^2 = 46.218$	4	.000	Joint family conditions significantly associated with migration
H ₀₄	There is no significant difference in workload and stress between joint and nuclear family members.	Independent Samples t-Test	t = -4.89	348	.000	Nuclear family members experience higher workload and stress



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The results of hypothesis testing provide strong and consistent empirical evidence in support of the study's central argument that modern social change has significantly transformed family organization in the study area. The rejection of the first null hypothesis confirms a statistically significant shift from joint to nuclear family structures, indicating that traditional extended family systems are gradually giving way to smaller, independent household units. This transition reflects broader processes of modernization, urbanization, and changing social values, where individual autonomy and privacy have become increasingly important. The findings further reveal that this transformation is not merely perceptual but is deeply embedded in everyday social practices, as respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged the declining prevalence and social relevance of joint families.

The second hypothesis testing results highlight the critical role of economic, educational, and socio-cultural factors in driving family reorganization. The strong statistical significance observed through the One-Sample t-test demonstrates that financial pressures, employment opportunities, educational aspirations, migration, women's empowerment, and changing cultural norms collectively contribute to the preference for nuclear family living. These factors indicate a shift from collective family dependence to individual decision-making and economic self-reliance. The third hypothesis establishes a significant association between joint family conditions and migration, suggesting that migration decisions are shaped not only by external economic opportunities but also by internal family dynamics such as lack of privacy, emotional stress, authority conflicts, and limited career support. Finally, the fourth hypothesis confirms a significant difference in workload and stress between joint and nuclear family members, with nuclear families experiencing higher levels of pressure due to multitasking and reduced support systems. Taken together, the hypothesis testing results demonstrate that family structure transformation is a multidimensional process influenced by socio-economic change, internal family relations, and evolving lifestyle demands, thereby reinforcing the sociological understanding of family reorganization in contemporary Indian society.

5. Conclusion

The present study concludes that modern social change has brought about a significant reorganization of family structure in India, as clearly reflected in the transition from joint families to nuclear families in Gwalior District. The empirical findings demonstrate that this transformation is strongly influenced by a combination of socio-economic, educational, cultural, and occupational factors, including urbanization, employment mobility, changing value systems, women's empowerment, and increasing aspirations for independence and privacy. The study also establishes that unfavourable conditions within joint families contribute to migration, particularly among younger members seeking education and employment opportunities. While nuclear families are perceived as more efficient and independent, the results reveal that they experience higher levels of workload and stress due to reduced shared



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responsibilities and limited support systems. Overall, the study highlights that family reorganization is a multidimensional and irreversible process shaped by modernization and structural change, emphasizing the need for social policies and community support mechanisms that address the emerging challenges of nuclear family living while preserving the positive aspects of traditional family support systems.

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