International Journal of Sociology and Political Science
www.sociologyjournal.in
E-ISSN: 2664-7745
Received: 30-09-2026, Accepted: 30-10-2026, Published: 14-11-2026
Volume 8, Issue 4, 2026, Page No. 47-52

Changing family structure and its impact on human behaviour: A sociological analysis

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.66856/ijsps.2026.8.4.8111

Abstract
Family is most important universal social institution. The family, as an institution is universal. It is the most permanent and the most pervasive of all social institutions. All societies both large and small, primitive and civilized, ancient and modern, have some form of family or the other. No one knows, or can know, how or when the family began. "There may be no families in Utopia, and none in paradise, but the planet we know best will probably always contain them" (Bierstedt, 1957). Family is a more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without child, or of a man or woman alone, with children"(M.F. Nimkoff, 1934). Family is "The biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children"(Eliot and Merrill, 1941). Family is "a group defined by sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children"(MacIver, 1949). Family is a fundamental social institution that plays a significant role in an individual's life by shaping their personality, values, attitudes, and behaviour. However, in contemporary society, family structures are undergoing continuous transformations due to social, economic, and cultural changes. These transformations influence not only the composition and functioning of families but also the nature of interpersonal relationships, emotional bonds, and patterns of socialization. Changes in family structure may also affect individuals' attitudes, social interactions, and behavioural patterns. In this context, the present paper aims to examine the changing patterns of family structure and analyse how these transformations influence human behaviour in contemporary society.

Keywords: Family system, structure, human behaviour, socialization**,** social change

Introduction

"Family is a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption constituting a single household interacting and intercommunicating with each other in their respective social roles of husband and wife, father and mother, son and daughter, brother and sister, creating a common culture"(Burgess& Locke,1945) [6]. Family serves as the primary agent of socialization through which individuals learn social values, cultural norms, moral principles, and patterns of behaviour. Its influence extends throughout the different stages of human life, from childhood to old age. However, in contemporary society, families are experiencing significant changes in their structure, composition, and functioning due to factors such as urbanization, industrialization, modernization, and changing lifestyles. The transition from traditional joint families to nuclear families, along with changing gender roles and interpersonal relationships, has transformed the nature of family interactions. These structural changes may influence individuals' emotional well-being, social behaviour, value systems, and patterns of social interaction. The present paper examines the changing structure of the family and its impact on human behaviour. It seeks to understand how transformations in family composition, relationships, and patterns of interaction influence individual behaviour and the socialisation process in contemporary society.

Literature Review

1. Roopa (2026), family as a fundamental social institution responsible for socialisation, emotional support, economic cooperation, cultural transmission, and social control. It discusses how factors such as urbanisation, industrialisation, education, migration, women's employment, individualisation, and digitalisation contribute to changes in family structure and functioning. She particularly focuses on the transition from joint and extended families to nuclear and geographically dispersed family arrangements. It also explores changes in marriage patterns, parent–child relationships, gender roles, elderly care, and the influence of technology on human behaviour. She provides a useful sociological perspective for understanding the relationship between changing family structures and individual behaviour in contemporary Indian society.

2. Das (2025) [14], explores how economic, social, environmental, cultural, and political factors contribute to migration and subsequently transform traditional family arrangements. Drawing on secondary data, sociological theories, and contextual observations, the author analyses changes in family patterns, gender roles, intergenerational relationships, caregiving responsibilities, and community cohesion. He highlights the growing transition from joint families to nuclear and modified extended families, alongside the emergence of female-headed households and changes in household economic arrangements. It also draws attention to the challenges associated with emotional relationships and the care of children and elderly family members when family members migrate. He provides a valuable sociological perspective on the relationship between migration and changing family structures in Assam. It is relevant to the present research because it helps explain how transformations in family organisation and relationships may influence individuals' emotional well-being, social interactions, and behavioural patterns. Further research can explore

these changes in greater depth by examining the direct relationship between changing family structures and human behaviour in specific social and cultural contexts.

3. Kanwar (2023) [13], She examines the transformation of family structures in contemporary Indian society, with particular emphasis on the emergence of single-parent and LGBTQIA families. She explores the socio-cultural factors contributing to changes in traditional family patterns and discusses the challenges experienced by families that differ from conventional family arrangements. It also considers the broader implications of these changes for individuals and society. Using a sociological descriptive approach, the research employs qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews, surveys, and content analysis, to understand the changing dynamics of family relationships. The study provides insights into the growing diversity of family forms and the changing perceptions of family, relationships, and social acceptance in India. It is relevant to the present study because it highlights how transformations in family structure may influence interpersonal relationships, emotional experiences, social adjustment, and individual behaviour. However, further research is needed to examine more specifically how different family arrangements affect human behaviour and socialisation across diverse socio-cultural settings.

4. Mondal and Pradhan (2025) [10] examined changes in family structures in India over approximately three decades, using data from five rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), covering 1992–1993 to 2019 [2]–2021. Their study analyses the relationship between family arrangements and socio-economic and demographic factors. The findings indicate that family structures in India have undergone considerable changes, including increases in single-person households, nuclear-pair households, and certain forms of extended families. The research challenges the assumption that family transformation follows a simple, uniform transition from joint to nuclear families. This study is relevant to the present research because it provides a broad understanding of changing family patterns and establishes the importance of examining how different household arrangements may influence social relationships, emotional support, and human behaviour.

5. Chakravorty, Goli, and James (2021), in their study “Family Demography in India: Emerging Patterns and Its Challenges,” discuss transformations in Indian family and household arrangements in the context of demographic, social, and economic change. The authors emphasise the importance of studying family size, household composition, and family formation to understand broader changes in Indian society. Their work draws attention to the consequences of changing family patterns for different members of the household. This research offers a useful foundation for the present study because changes in household composition may affect the distribution of responsibilities, the availability of emotional support, intergenerational relationships, and individuals' everyday experiences. It also highlights the need to understand family change as a complex social process rather than simply a shift in household size.

6. Gopala krishan (2021), in “Changing Scenario of Family System in India: An Analysis Against the Backdrop of Changing Social Values,” explores the relationship between family transformation and changing values in Indian society. The study explains how industrialisation, urbanisation, and modernisation have contributed to changes in traditional joint-family arrangements. It also discusses the growing importance of individual independence and conjugal relationships in contemporary family life. The author highlights a shift in emphasis from collective responsibilities and wider kinship ties towards individual preferences and relationships between spouses. This work is particularly relevant to the present research because changing family values may influence individual attitudes, decision-making, relationships, and patterns of behaviour. It provides a sociological basis for investigating how changes in family organisation are associated with changing expectations and behaviour in contemporary society.

7. Goode (1963) [8] explored the relationship between industrialisation, modernisation, and changes in family systems. His comparative analysis demonstrated that family patterns are influenced by wider social and economic transformations. Changes in employment, education, urbanisation, and geographical mobility can reshape household organisation and relationships between generations. Such transformations may increase individual independence while also changing the traditional expectations associated with family responsibilities and authority.

8. In sociology Durkheim's give importance of social institutions in maintaining social order and solidarity or unity. The family plays a significant role in transmitting social norms, values, and moral responsibilities from one generation to another generation. Changes in family structure may influence the nature of relationships among family members and affect the ways individuals learn social expectations. From this perspective, the changing pattern of family relationships can be examined in relation to changing patterns of social integration and individual behaviour.

9. Parson’s study the family as an significant institution responsible for the socialisation of children and the stabilisation of adult personalities. The family provides an environment in which children learn social roles, discipline, and culturally accepted patterns of behaviour. Changes in family organisation, including the movement from extended to nuclear households, may alter the distribution of responsibilities and the nature of interaction between parents and children. This perspective is useful for understanding how family arrangements influence personality development and behavioural patterns.

10. Powell *et al.* (2016) [3] examined research on different family forms and their implications for children. Their review considered how family structure, parental characteristics, and the broader social context shape children's experiences. The authors emphasised the importance of recognising diversity in family arrangements rather than judging all families against a single traditional model. This perspective is relevant to understanding how changing family structures may influence children's socialisation, adjustment, and behaviour. It also highlights that the quality of family relationships and the circumstances in which children grow up are important considerations.

Research Objective

1. To analyse the changing trends and patterns of family structure in India.
2. To examine the sociological factors responsible for changing family structure.
3. To assess the impact of changing family structure on human behaviour.

Research Questions

1. What are the major changes observed in family structure in recent decades?
2. What sociological factors are responsible for changing family structure?
3. How does changing family structure affect human behaviour and socialization?

Methodology

This study is descriptive and analytical in nature and based on secondary data. Data has been collected from census of India (2001-2011), NFHS-5, books, journals, Magazine, articles, government reports. Qualitative content analysis method was used to analyse the changing family structure and its impact on human behavior from sociological perspective.

The changing trends and patterns of family structure in India from traditional joint family to nuclear single-parent family

Milton Singer (1959) has identified five factors which have affected the family most which include education, industrialization, urbanization, and change in the institution of marriage (Savita, 2025) [10]. A.P. Desai, in his famous work, Some Aspects of Family in Mahuva (1964). Milton Singer (1968), in his study of joint family structures among industrialists in Madras City, examined the relationship between traditional family organisation and industrial development. His findings suggest that the joint family system did not act as an obstacle to entrepreneurship. Rather, it demonstrated the ability to adjust to the changing economic environment and supported the process of industrialisation. Similarly, Orenstein, in his study of the historical development of extended families in India, analysed census data covering the period from 1811 to 1951. His findings indicate that industrialisation and urbanisation did not necessarily lead to the disappearance of joint and large family structures in Indian society.

However, he also observed that the prevalence of joint families varied across different sections of society. The 2011 Census highlights significant changes in family patterns in India. Although the trend towards nuclearisation has become increasingly prominent, joint living arrangements have also continued to exist and have shown growth, particularly in urban areas. This development is partly associated with rural-to-urban migration, where individuals and families moving to cities often share accommodation and household resources with migrants from the same region. Such arrangements reflect the importance of regional connections, mutual support and collective living practices even within rapidly urbanising societies. Thus, the changing family structure in India indicates that modernisation and urbanisation do not necessarily eliminate joint living arrangements but may also create new forms of family and household relationships (2011 [4] census).

The process of structural transformation has brought significant changes to traditional systems of authority and established social values. The growing influence of individualism has challenged long-standing hierarchical relationships and traditional forms of authority within society. At the same time, conventional beliefs, norms and values are gradually being re-examined and reshaped in response to changing social conditions. These developments reflect the transition from traditional patterns of social organization towards more individual-oriented and flexible forms of relationships.

Moreover The process of social transformation has also affected emotional relationships and interpersonal bonds among different generations within families. Traditional values such as mutual respect, love, care and affection among family members have gradually weakened in some households. The growing influence of consumerism and changing lifestyles has further contributed to these changes. As a result, the widening generation gap has left many elderly people feeling isolated, neglected and emotionally dissatisfied. At the same time, the weakening of emotional connections and family relationships may create feelings of insecurity and identity confusion among younger family members. These developments reflect the challenges faced by families in maintaining intergenerational relationships amid changing social and cultural conditions.

The absence of adequate emotional support and understanding within the family may make young people more vulnerable to social problems such as alcoholism and drug addiction. Family relationships and emotional bonding play an important role in shaping the behaviour and well-being of young individuals. However, the traditional values of togetherness, cooperation and collective responsibility associated with the joint family system have not always remained equally strong or effective under changing social conditions. This suggests that the joint family system, despite its traditional emphasis on emotional and social support, also faces challenges in maintaining its role in contemporary society.

Census reports and historical records indicate a gradual decline in the proportion of traditional nuclear families, particularly in urbanized and industrialized societies. This transformation in family structure is associated with several social and demographic changes. The increasing rate of divorce has contributed to the growth of single-parent households and other alternative family arrangements. Similarly, changing attitudes towards marriage and parenthood have encouraged many individuals to prioritise higher education, career development and personal goals before establishing families, resulting in delayed marriages

and childbearing. Furthermore, cohabitation without formal marriage has become increasingly accepted in many societies and is emerging as an alternative form of family living. These developments reflect changing social values, greater individual freedom and the growing diversity of family arrangements in contemporary society (Patil & Mishra).

Sociological factors responsible for changing family structure

1. **Industrialization:** Industrialization is one the major factor for changing family structure. This process creating new employment opportunities in factories, industries and urban centres which impact on family structure. Basically people increasingly move away from their homes for work, which may encourage the transition from joint to nuclear family.

2. **Urbanization:** The expansion of urban areas and city life has encouraged smaller families because of limited living space, higher living costs and changing lifestyle.

3. **Education:** The growth modern education which impact on family pattern. Education has increased awareness, individual independence and the desire for personal development influencing family roles and relationship.

4. **Growth of women's status:** Women's participation in education, employment and decision making has changed traditional gender roles and the distribution of responsibilities within families.

5. **Migration:** Due to migration peoples go different places for employment, education and better opportunities often separates family members geographically and contribution to the growth of nuclear families.

6. **Individualism:** The increasing emphasis on personal freedom, privacy and individual aspiration has influenced people's preferences for smaller and more independent family units.

7. **Changes in marriage patterns:** changing pattern of marriage also impact on family structure like increasing age at marriage, changing partner selection and the growing acceptance of divorce have influenced family structure.

8. **Technological development:** Various technological development also impact on family structure. The development digital communication, social media and modern household technologies have changed family interactions, communication patterns and everyday domestic life.

9. **Decline of Traditional authority:** Day to day traditional old family member authority have been declined. Now younger generations increasing make independent decisions about education, employment, marriage and lifestyle.

10. **Changing in social values and norms:** Traditional family roles, values like family obligations, gender roles and intergenerational relationship have changed contributing to new forms of family organization.

11. **Globalization:** There have been both positive and negetive effects of globalisation on indian society. Globalization also impact on family structure, values, rules, its also help to rise nuclear and single person household. Due to globalization various forms of families also developed like blended family , LGBTQ family, child free couples families, stem family etc.

The impact of changing family structure on human behavior

Due to various sociological factors which impact on family structure and pattern. Through this changing area human behavior also impacted. This change affects the socialization process. Because we know that the family is the first and primary agent of socialization. Therefore, all aspects of a child develop within the family. They learn about society both mentally and socially. So, this change in the family has impacted an individual's personality.

1. **Changes in Socialization Process**: The transition from traditional joint families to modern nuclear families can influence in socialization process. Absent of proper learning process its impact on children behavior. Now its created problems to learn social norms, cultural values, traditions, discipline, and acceptable patterns of behavior.

2. **Changes in Emotional Relationships**: This changing pattern also impact on emotional relationship, day to day people becoming more individualistic in mind. Modern family structures may encourage greater independence, but reduced interaction with extended family members can sometimes limit emotional support and interpersonal bonding.

3. **Development of Individualism**: Modern family developed individualistic mind. The growing preference for nuclear families may encourage individual decision-making, personal freedom, self-reliance, and the pursuit of individual goals.

4. **Changes in Parent–Child Relationships:** In modern society, both husbands and wives are increasingly engaged in professional and occupational activities to meet the economic and social demands of their families. As a result, many parents have limited time to spend with their children. This reduction in parental interaction may affect children's emotional development, socialisation, and behavioral patterns.

5. **Impact on Children's Behaviour:** Children's behaviour is also undergoing significant changes in modern society. Due to the increasing work responsibilities of both parents, children often receive less attention, care, and emotional support within the family. When parents are unable to spend sufficient time with their children, they may experience loneliness, emotional insecurity, and a lack of parental guidance. Parenting plays an essential role in

developing children's confidence, self-esteem, social skills, and emotional stability.

6. **Changes in Gender Roles:** Changing family pattern and women's participation in education, decision making process and employment may encourage more shared household responsibilities and changes in traditional expectations regarding men and women.

7. **Changes in Social Interaction**: The development of modern family structure which Reduced contact with relatives in everyday family life may influence opportunities to develop cooperation, adjustment, sharing, and interpersonal skills. These skills may also be developed through schools, peer groups, and other social institutions.

8. **Changes in Cultural Norms and Values:** The movement away from joint family living may influence how traditional customs, rituals, family histories, and cultural practices are communicated to younger generations.

9. **Changes in Family Solidarity**: The changing structure of modern families also affects family solidarity and emotional relationships among family members. Due to increasing professional responsibilities and busy work schedules, both husbands and wives often have limited time to spend with their children and other family members. This may gradually reduce regular family interaction, communication, and emotional attachment. Traditionally, family solidarity was strengthened through shared responsibilities, mutual support, care, and spending time together.

10. **Development of Responsibility and Independence**: Due to modern family pattern Individuals living in nuclear families may gain greater opportunities to make decisions and manage household responsibilities independently, although the level of independence varies across families.

Policy Recommendations for the Future Improvement of Human Behaviour and Social Development

Based on the recommendations provided by Das (2025) [14], several policy measures can be suggested to address the social and behavioural challenges associated with changing family structures, migration, declining community support and changing gender roles. These recommendations focus on strengthening family relationships, promoting social responsibility and improving the overall well-being of individuals and communities.

The government should introduce appropriate measures to address the challenges arising from changing social and family structures. Establishment of Community Elderly Care Centers. Community-based elderly care centres should be established to provide older people with emotional support, social interaction and basic care, particularly in families where younger members migrate for employment. Creation of Migration Support Cells: Migration support cells should be established at the district level to provide information, guidance and necessary assistance to individuals migrating for employment. Strengthening Rural Employment Opportunities: The government should create more employment opportunities in rural areas to reduce distress migration and enable individuals to remain connected with their families and communities**.** Develop Community-Based Solutions. Community participation is essential for maintaining social relationships, cultural values and collective responsibility. Formation of Village Support Groups: Local support groups should be formed to provide assistance, care and emotional support to elderly people and children, particularly in families where parents or adult children are away for work. Promotion of Youth Clubs. Community organizations should be encouraged to preserve traditional customs, cultural practices and social values among younger generations. Community-level activities, social gatherings and collective participation should be promoted to strengthen social bonds, mutual cooperation and a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

Family is one of the most fundamental social institutions, playing a significant role in shaping an individual's personality, values, attitudes and behaviour. It acts as the primary agent of socialisation by transmitting cultural traditions, social norms, moral values and patterns of behaviour from one generation to another. However, the structure and functioning of families in Indian society have undergone considerable transformations due to industrialisation, urbanisation, modernisation, education, migration, women's employment, globalisation and changing social values.

The present study highlights that the transformation of family structure from traditional joint and extended families towards nuclear, single-parent and other diverse family arrangements has influenced various aspects of human behaviour. These changes have both positive and negative consequences. On the positive impact like , modern family arrangements have encouraged individual freedom, independence, women's empowerment, shared decision-making and personal development. On the other hand, reduced interaction among family members, weakening of emotional relationships, changes in parent-child relationships, loneliness among children, elderly neglect and declining family solidarity have emerged as important concerns. The increasing professional responsibilities of both parents may also limit the time available for childcare, emotional support and family interaction, thereby influencing children's behavioural and emotional development.

From a sociological perspective, the study also highlights that family transformation should not be understood simply as the decline of traditional family arrangements. Rather, it represents a broader process of social change in which family roles, responsibilities, relationships and values are continuously being reshaped. Although family structures may change over time, the importance of emotional support, mutual understanding, cooperation and social responsibility remains essential for individual and social well-being.

Therefore, appropriate government interventions and community-based initiatives are necessary to address the challenges associated with changing family structures. Establishing community elderly care centres, strengthening rural employment opportunities, providing migration support, promoting village-level support groups and encouraging women's economic and social empowerment can contribute to improving family and community well-

being. Similarly, greater attention should be given to children's emotional development, intergenerational relationships and the preservation of cultural values.

Finally, the study concludes that changes in family structure have a significant relationship with human behaviour and the socialisation process. The need of the present society is not necessarily to restore traditional family arrangements but to strengthen the positive values of care, affection, cooperation, responsibility and solidarity within changing family systems. A balanced relationship between individual independence and collective responsibility can contribute to healthier family relationships, positive human behaviour and sustainable social development.

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