

AN ANALYSIS OF CHANGE IN FAMILY COMPOSITION

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Many studies on family in India highlight the issue of change in its composition. The studies use different approaches.

The present analysis uses an approach of comparing family composition at two points of time. This approach not only minimizes certain limitations of the others, but also enables one to identify different positions and directions of change in family composition. A low rate of expansion towards extended families, more or less en-bloc movement towards nuclear families and a high rate of stability in nuclear families, together, confirm the direction of change in family composition towards nucleation.

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Introduction

Whether as a primary or secondary objective, many studies on family in India highlight the issue of change in family patterns or types. By and large, the analysis of family change in different studies is attempted by comparing (a) existing predominant family types with those that existed in the ideal past, (b) general patterns observed in different empirical studies conducted in either urban or rural areas, or (c) family types existing in rural and urban or in two or more urban parts, under one study plan. Naik (1978), for instance, has used these comparisons in one study.

These comparisons do meet either or both the requirements — points of time and places — for observing a change in family. An appraisal of these comparisons, however, raises two methodologically significant issues: (i) sources and nature of evidence, and (ii) measurement or classification of families. A brief elaboration would show their significance.

In the first kind of comparison, empirical evidence, collected at a point of time, is compared with non-empirical qualitative observations, which are recorded in religious texts or commentaries on them. It is true that such use of empirical and non-empirical evidence are, generally, made for developing a researchable issue or for stray comparisons. They are not used for comprehensive

comparisons and conclusive findings. The second comparison is made between two sets of empirical evidence. Often, criteria used in classification of family types in two studies do not match. In the third comparison, the differences in criteria for classification of households are controlled or checked, as the same researcher classifies families from different sub-samples, one from an urban area and the other from a rural area. But, the data in such studies are analysed at group-level. One makes observations like "nuclear families predominate in one urban area over those in the other" or "joint families prevail more in rural areas than in urban". To arrive at these, the researcher looks at independent frequencies for two urban areas or urban and rural areas. One wonders whether the researcher ascertains differences/ similarities between the areas in which he conducts his study.

To minimize certain limitations like differences in classification, analysis at group level and latent similarities in two or more areas, a change in family composition may be studied by collecting data, from the same respondents, at two points of time — asking them to report the present and to recall the past. This kind of comparison not only ensures uniform classification of households but it also enables one to measure change at individual level, in one-to-one relation, and sharpen observations

on directions of change in family composition over a time span.

To show how this kind of comparison (at two points of time for the same sample) works, relevant data were compiled from a study of jawans (Naik and Ratna, 1976). In this study, the respondents, 659 released jawans, were asked to give information at two points of time.... at the time of their release from military services (past) and at the time of investigation (present).

Family compositions, at the two points of time, are analysed by using a technique of comparative squeeze. According to this technique, two sets of data, on the same issue, are merged, just as a subtraction process in mathematics, to derive three or more positions.... stable families, at the centre, and deviation points on either side of the stable position, as expanded or divided families. If a family remains unchanged over a time span, it is called stable. If another family adds new 'qualifying' individuals, say daughters-in-law, it shows a change in terms of expansion and places itself on one side of the stable position. The other side of the stable position is allocated to a family from which 'qualifying' member(s), say married sons, depart, and cause(s) a split or division in it.

Family Change

A wide range of household compositions were classified into different types of family. This classification was based on two criteria: (i) completeness of conjugal relations and (ii) extensions of kin beyond the conjugal links. An elaboration would be useful here. The information about family composition at the two points of time was gathered from respondents — jawans or widows of deceased jawans. Neither of the respondents as individuals was used as a reference point in the classification. The reference point was a couple, first, and, second, extended links on lineal or lateral sides or both.

These family types are arranged progressively. The serial numbers assigned to each indicate their positions on the progressive order.

Distributions of Families

As the distributions, presented in Table-1, show, at the time of investigation (present) nuclear families had formed a single largest proportion. Extended or joint families followed the order. Against this, these two types, nuclear and extended, had an equal spread in the past.

<i>Types</i>	<i>Compositions</i>
1. Non-familial households	Persons who were staying together but did not have conjugal relations. For instance, a widow /ed father/ mother staying with unmarried children etc.
2. Nuclear	A couple with or without unmarried children.
3. Nuclear lineal	A nuclear family with one of the widowed parents.
4. Nuclear lateral	A nuclear family with brothers/sisters/cousins, either unmarried or widowed.
5. Nuclear both	A nuclear lineal and nuclear lateral.
6. Extended/joint	At least two nuclear families of two brothers or sons, with or without other extended links.

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILIES AT THE TIME OF INVESTIGATION AND AT THE TIME OF RELEASE

Types	Time of Release	Time of Investigation
1. Non-familial	5.2	14.3
2. Nuclear	35.7	41.0
3. Nuclear lineal	13.3	10.6
i. Nuclear lateral	3.0	8.2
5. Nuclear both	7.1	3.8
6. Extended/Joint	35.7	22.1
Total	659	659

A comparison of the two distributions shows that over a period of time the families tended to move towards non-familial households, or nuclear or nuclear lateral than to be extended or joint ones.

Attention may be drawn to the comparison and observation based on it. The comparison of two independent frequencies appears to be similar to the one made between distributions of families in two or more urban areas or urban-rural parts. The increase or decrease in percentages of two family-distributions does help researchers to identify points as well as directions of family change. For instance, families seem to change to one or the other nuclear variety. But, this kind of comparison suppresses different shades of change, does not help one to identify expanded and divided family and is not useful to locate family types which expand and divide.

Directions of Change

To identify such directions of change

.... expansion and division on either side of stable positions, the family types were matched at the individual level. The outcome of this comparative squeeze showed that a considerably large number (48 per cent) of the families had remained stable over a time span. The incidence of division (37 per cent) was far more vulnerable than the incidence of change due to expansion (15 per cent) of the families.

How did these families change? Did they expand and move to the next successive higher level or manifest an abrupt change by skipping levels? Similarly, how did the divided family change their positions on the progressive line?

To measure the levels of change, the types of families, as mentioned earlier, were arranged on a progressive order. Each one was assigned numbers in an ascending order. A non-familial type was given number 1 and extended the number six. The levels of expansion were identified by subtracting the numbers assigned to families at the two points of time. To illustrate, if a non-familial type — No. 1 — changes to become a nuclear (No. 2), it is said to have expanded by one level. If another non-familial type becomes an extended family, it is said to have expanded by five levels —an abrupt movement. The same procedure is adopted to identify the levels of change in the divided families. The levels, thus computed, are presented, in Table; 2, separately for expanded and divided families, along with stable families, in percentages.

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILIES BY LEVELS OF CHANGE IN EXPANDED AND DIVIDED FAMILIES

Positions of change	Levels of change						Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Stable	100.0	—	—	—	—	—	317
Expansion	—	30.3	25.3	12.1	29.3	3.0	99
Division	—	25.9	21.8	11.5	28.4	12.4	243

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF EXPANDED FAMILIES BY TYPES AT THE TIME OF RELEASE (PAST)
AND AT TIME OF INVESTIGATION (PRESENT)

Family Types at Present

Family Types (Past)	Non Familial	Nuclear	Nuclear Lineal	Nuclear Lateral	Nuclear Both	Extended/ Joint	Total
Non-Familial	—	66.7	8.3	8.3	4.2	12.5	24
Nuclear	—	—	12.3	31.6	7.0	49.1	57
Nuclear Lineal	—	—	—	22.2	11.1	66.7	9
Nuclear Lateral	—	—	—	—	—	100.0	4
Nuclear Both	—	—	—	—	—	100.0	5
Extended/Joint	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	—	16.2	9.1	22.1	6.1	46.5	99

TABLE 4

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF DIVIDED FAMILIES BY TYPES IN THE PAST AND AT PRESENT

Family Types at Present

Family Types (Past)	Non Familial	Nuclear	Nuclear Lineal	Nuclear Lateral	Nuclear Both	Extended/ Joint	Total
Non-Familial	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nuclear	100.0	—	—	—	—	—	29
Nuclear Lineal	39.5	60.5	—	—	—	—	38
Nuclear Lateral	20.0	80.0	—	—	—	—	10
Nuclear Both	25.8	41.9	22.6	9.7	—	—	31
Extended/Joint	22.2	45.2	9.6	17.0	5.9	—	135
Total	34.6	43.2	8.2	10.7	3.3	—	243

TABLE 5

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF STABLE FAMILIES BY TYPES AT PRESENT

Family Types

Non Familial	Nuclear	Nuclear Lineal	Nuclear Lateral	Nuclear Both	Extended/ Joint	Total
3.2	47.0	12.9	1.9	3.5	31.5	317

The trends in change, by levels in the expanded and the divided families are revealing. By and large, families expand or divide by either moving to the next or by skipping, suddenly, by three levels, on the higher or lower order, respectively. While expansion in the erst-while families takes place gradually.... movement to the next higher position division leads to abrupt shifts — by three levels on the lower order ... in family status.

Further analysis of change in each type sharpens these observations on the directions of family change. Table-3 and Table-4 show the specific movements in the expanded and divided families, respectively.

A couple of observations may be highlighted distinctly. When families change in the direction of expansion, except non-familial type, all the types of families change over to extended families. The non-familial households move over to the next higher order i.e. nuclear families. The divided families, too, tend to show similar shifts. Except the nuclear type of families, all other types of families, suddenly, move back to assume the status of a nuclear family. The erst-while nuclear families, however, become non-familial households.

If the trend in change in family composition, due to division (Table 4) is seen along-with the trend in the stability of families (Table 5), one would be inclined to say that, by and large, families tend to be nuclear, over a period of time.

In this context, a question may be raised to know whether the change in family composition in the direction of nucleation is due to the period lapsed between two points of time — at the time of release and at the time of study. This is probably because as the time passes the family tends to enlarge in its size and kin-links. After a point of time the same family may become small or contract in terms of generation depth and kin-links due either to the natural

process of death of the older ones or to the departure of grown-up children to establish their own households.

The present data do not permit verification of either of the interpretations. It is however, possible to note the point of time at which the process of contraction in family takes place.

For this purpose, three shifts (Division, Stable and Expansion) in the families were examined in relation to age of the respondents at the time of the study. The age-groups indicate generation lines, set by intervals of 30 years. The distribution is given in Table-6.

TABLE 6

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILIES BY SHIFTS IN FAMILY COMPOSITION AND AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Age	Shifts in Family Composition			Total
	Divided	Stable	Expanded	
21—30 yrs	12.5	84.4	3.1	32
31—60 yrs	30.8	55.8	13.4	402
61+yrs	32.9	37.6	29.4	85
Total	30.1	54.5	15.4	519*

* Of the remaining 140 Respondents, 137 were deceased and three did not specify their age. $\chi^2 = 28.339$, $df = 4$, p at .01

The distribution, Table 6, suggests that families tend to remain stable in the early ages, i.e., up-to 30 years of age, thereafter they tend to shrink more than expand. The marked change in family towards contraction seems to begin after 30 years and that of expansion after 60 years of age.

In Sum

A change in family can, ideally, be measured in longitudinal studies. In the absence of such data, it may be studied by

comparing household compositions; of the same sample, at two points of time. An approach of this kind does not only minimise certain limitations (differences in classifications, differences/similarities in geographical areas, inferences drawn from two independent distributions) in the other kinds of comparisons, but also enables one to identify different positions and specific directions of change in family composition.

As seen in this analysis, a comparatively small number of families expand. When they expand, families tend to accommodate relatives beyond nuclear links. While non-familial households become nuclear, the nuclear, nuclear lineal and nuclear lateral tend to become joint/extended families. A

larger number of families shrink and tend to form a nucleus of limited links. A still larger number of families remain stable. Among them more of the nuclear ones tend to retain their erst-while composition. In short, (a) the low rate of expansion of nuclear families towards extended ones, (b) more or less en-bloc movement of almost all varieties of families towards nuclear ones, and (c) a high rate of stability in nuclear families, together, confirm the direction of change in family composition towards nucleation. The process of shrinking of families tends to begin after the age of thirty. The expansion in families seems to start late i.e., after 60 yrs. of age.

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