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Urbanization and the Transformation of Traditional Family Values in Developing Nations: A Mixed-Methods Study of Dehli, Dhaka, and Jakarta

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the transformation of traditional family values amid rapid urbanization in three large South and Southeast Asian cities: Delhi, Dhaka, and Jakarta. Adopting an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research combines a household survey of 1,500 respondents (Delhi n = 550, Dhaka n = 450, Jakarta n = 500) collected between March and September 2023 with 60 in-depth interviews conducted across 20 multi-generational families. Quantitative analysis using regression and mediation modelling tests the relationships between urbanization indicators, family structure, and values orientation; qualitative analysis using reflexive thematic analysis explores the lived experience of intergenerational value negotiation. Findings indicate that joint family arrangements declined from approximately 62 per cent of urban households in 1990 to 31 per cent in 2023 across the three cities, with the steepest decline in Delhi. Regression analysis indicates that each additional year of female education raises the modernization-of-values score by 0.046 standard deviations ($p < .001$), holding household income constant, with education effects partially mediated by labour force participation. Qualitative analysis identifies four overarching themes: negotiated tradition, intergenerational dialogue, hybrid family forms, and eldercare anxiety. The study contributes to the literature on family transformation by providing comparative cross-city evidence from South and Southeast Asia and by extending modernisation theory through attention to the active negotiation of cultural materials across generations within urban families.

Keywords: Urbanization; family values; intergenerational relations; developing nations; modernization; South Asia; Southeast Asia

1. Introduction

South and Southeast Asia are undergoing the most rapid urban transition in human history. According to UN-Habitat (2023), the urban population of South and Southeast Asia together rose from approximately 480 million in 1990 to 1.4 billion in 2023, with projections exceeding 2.2 billion by 2040. The cities of Delhi, Dhaka, and Jakarta, each among the largest in the world, exemplify the scale and pace of this transformation. The urban transition is accompanied by, and inseparably linked with, transformations in family structure, gender relations, intergenerational obligations, and the broader value orientations that shape household life. The classical sociological literature on modernization, from Parsons (1955) through Goode (1963) to Inglehart and Welzel (2005), has theorised these transformations in various ways, generally predicting a move from extended, patriarchal family forms to nuclear, more egalitarian arrangements.

Empirical evidence from Asia has both supported and complicated these classical predictions. The decline of joint family arrangements in urban Indian households, documented in census and survey data from the 1980s onwards (Niranjan et al., 2005), has been a familiar empirical anchor. Similar declines have been documented in urban Bangladeshi and Indonesian households. However, the persistence of strong intergenerational economic and emotional ties, the rise of distributed family forms involving

labour migration, and the active negotiation of cultural materials across generations have all qualified any simple modernisation narrative. The present study contributes to this empirical and theoretical conversation by providing directly comparable cross-city evidence and by integrating quantitative and qualitative analysis within a single research design.

Three research questions guide the analysis. RQ1: How have family structures and value orientations changed in Delhi, Dhaka, and Jakarta between 1990 and 2023, and what are the principal predictors of these changes? RQ2: Does female education contribute to value transformation, and what mechanisms mediate this contribution? RQ3: How do members of multi-generational urban families narrate the experience of value negotiation and the changing meaning of family obligation? The study contributes by providing comparative cross-city evidence, by integrating regression-based and mediation analyses with rich qualitative material, and by elaborating an analytical framework attentive to the active agency of family members in shaping value orientations rather than treating values as passively determined by macro-structural conditions.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical and empirical literature. Section 3 details the mixed-methods design. Section 4 reports findings. Section 5 discusses theoretical and policy implications. Section 6 concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical frameworks: modernisation, second demographic transition, family systems

The sociological analysis of family transformation under conditions of urbanisation draws on several theoretical traditions. Modernisation theory, associated with Parsons (1955) and Goode (1963), advanced the proposition that industrialisation and urbanisation produce a structural shift from extended to nuclear family arrangements, with corresponding changes in gender roles, intergenerational obligations, and value orientations. The second demographic transition perspective (Lesthaeghe, 2010; van de Kaa, 1987) extends this analysis to capture more recent changes including delayed marriage and childbearing, increased divorce, the rise of cohabitation, and the spread of post-materialist values. Both frameworks have been productively applied to Asian contexts while requiring substantial qualification.

Family systems theory (Bengtson, 2001) provides a complementary framework that emphasises intergenerational solidarity across multiple dimensions: associational (frequency of contact), affective (emotional closeness), consensual (agreement on values), functional (exchange of support), normative (sense of obligation), and structural (geographic proximity). This multidimensional framework permits a more nuanced understanding of family continuity and change than unidimensional declension narratives. Asian family scholarship has applied this framework productively, documenting persistent strong intergenerational ties alongside structural change (Hashimoto and Ikels, 2005; Jayakody, 2004; Croll, 2006).

2.2 Empirical evidence on urban Asian family change

Empirical work on family change in urban Asia has produced rich evidence with significant variation by country and by aspect of family life. For India, Singh et al. (2018), Patel (2021), and Niranjan et al. (2005) have documented the decline of joint family arrangements alongside the persistence of strong intergenerational support ties. For Bangladesh, Kabeer (2018) and Rahman (2020) have examined the intersection of urbanisation, female labour force participation, and family change, with attention to the distinctive role of garment-sector employment in shaping urban women's lives. For Indonesia, Hugo et al. (2003) and Setiawan (2022) have documented urban family change, with attention to the role of internal migration and the multi-locality of many families. Common findings across these studies include the persistence of intergenerational economic and emotional ties despite structural

change, the active role of women in shaping value orientations, and the emergence of new family forms not well captured by classical typologies.

2.3 Research gap

Three gaps in the literature motivate the present study. First, directly comparable cross-city evidence on family transformation in South and Southeast Asia is uncommon. Second, mediation analyses linking education to value orientations through specific mechanisms (labour force participation, autonomy, networks) are rare. Third, integration of quantitative and qualitative analysis within a single design that captures both pattern and meaning is uncommon. The present study addresses these gaps.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The research design is an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative phase, conducted between March and June 2023, involved a household survey administered through face-to-face interviews. The qualitative phase, conducted between July and September 2023, involved 60 in-depth interviews across 20 multi-generational families purposively selected to capture variation in city, socioeconomic status, family structure, and religion. The two phases were integrated at the analytical and interpretive stages through joint display analysis (Fetters et al., 2013).

3.2 Sampling and data collection

The quantitative sample comprised 1,500 households drawn through multi-stage cluster sampling: (i) administrative units within each city were stratified by socioeconomic status; (ii) within each stratum, sample areas were randomly selected; (iii) within each sample area, households were randomly drawn from listed addresses. The achieved response rate was 76 per cent. The survey instrument, developed in English and translated into Hindi, Bengali, and Bahasa Indonesia using forward-and-back procedures, captured demographic information, family structure, gender role attitudes, intergenerational support exchanges, religiosity, and a modernisation-of-values scale adapted from the World Values Survey. Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.79 for all multi-item scales in the final sample.

The qualitative sample comprised 20 families (7 in Delhi, 6 in Dhaka, 7 in Jakarta), with three generations represented in each family: a senior generation aged 65+, a middle generation aged 35-55, and a younger generation aged 18-30. Interviews were conducted with each generational respondent separately, totalling 60 interviews. Interview language was the respondent's preferred language. Topic guides covered family history, current family arrangements, value transmission, intergenerational tensions and resolutions, and aspirations for future family life.

3.3 Analytical strategy

Quantitative analysis proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive statistics characterised family structure and value orientations across the three cities and over time (using retrospective items and comparison with prior survey data where available). Second, OLS regression estimated the relationship between predictors (education, income, religion, urban tenure) and value orientations. Third, mediation analysis using the Hayes PROCESS macro tested specific causal pathways (e.g., education → labour force participation → value modernisation). Qualitative analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic approach in NVivo 14 with two independent coders for an initial subset (Cohen's kappa = 0.84).

4. Results

4.1 Family structure change

Table 1 summarises family structure changes across the three cities. Comparison with 1990 census data (where available) and with prior survey waves indicates that joint family arrangements (households containing more than two adult generations sharing a residence) declined from approximately 62 per cent of urban households in 1990 to 31 per cent in 2023, with the steepest decline in Delhi (from 67 per cent to 28 per cent) and the most modest in Jakarta (from 56 per cent to 35 per cent). Average household size declined from 5.4 persons in 1990 to 3.7 persons in 2023 across the three cities. Female-headed households rose from 6 per cent in 1990 to 14 per cent in 2023. Mean age at first marriage increased by approximately 4 years over the period.

4.2 Value orientations

Table 2 presents regression results for the modernisation-of-values scale (range 1-5, higher values indicate more modern orientations). Female education was the strongest single predictor: each additional year of completed schooling raised the modernisation-of-values score by 0.046 standard deviations ($p < .001$), holding income, age, and religiosity constant. Household income had a smaller but significant positive coefficient. Religiosity was negatively associated with modernisation-of-values scores, but the magnitude was modest. Country fixed effects indicated that Jakarta respondents scored slightly higher on the modernisation scale than Delhi or Dhaka respondents, controlling for other variables. The cumulative effect of these predictors across two generations within sampled families was substantial: parents and adult children differed on the modernisation-of-values scale by an average of 0.78 standard deviations.

4.3 Mediation analysis

Mediation analysis tested whether the effect of female education on modernisation-of-values was mediated by labour force participation. The direct effect of education on values, controlling for the mediator, remained significant ($\beta = 0.029$, $p < .001$) but was reduced from the unmediated estimate ($\beta = 0.046$). The indirect effect through labour force participation was 0.017, with a 95 per cent bootstrap confidence interval of [0.011, 0.024], indicating partial mediation. The mediation pattern was strongest in Dhaka, where female labour force participation has expanded rapidly through the garment sector, and weakest in Delhi, where formal female labour force participation remains lower despite high educational attainment.

4.4 Qualitative themes

Reflexive thematic analysis of the 60 interviews identified four overarching themes. The first, negotiated tradition, captured the active and conscious work that family members undertake to preserve, adapt, or reject specific cultural materials. A 28-year-old engineer in Jakarta described his family's evolving practice around Lebaran (Eid ul-Fitr): 'We keep the visiting tradition strong, but my mother adapted the food and timing for our work schedules.' The second theme, intergenerational dialogue, captured the structured and unstructured conversations through which value transmission occurs across generations. The third theme, hybrid family forms, captured the diversity of arrangements that do not fit classical typologies, including multi-locality families (where members are dispersed across multiple cities or countries), elastic households (where co-residents change over the life course), and digitally connected extended families (where geographical separation is mediated by daily video contact). The fourth theme, eldercare anxiety, captured the widespread concern about the practical arrangements for elder care under conditions of nuclear residential arrangements, female labour force participation, and changing intergenerational expectations.

5. Discussion

The empirical findings extend modernisation theory in several ways. The decline of joint family arrangements is consistent with classical predictions, but the persistence of strong intergenerational

economic and emotional ties qualifies any simple convergence narrative. The mediation evidence linking female education to value modernisation through labour force participation refines understanding of the mechanism, suggesting that value change is not a direct effect of education but operates through the lived experience of economic participation and the autonomy it confers. The qualitative theme of negotiated tradition highlights the active agency of family members and suggests that classical theoretical frameworks have under-attended to the conscious cultural work undertaken by Asian urban families.

Comparative findings across the three cities reveal both common patterns and city-specific dynamics. Delhi has experienced the steepest decline in joint family arrangements but the lowest female labour force participation among the three cities, suggesting that structural change in family residence patterns and economic participation can be partially decoupled. Dhaka exhibits the strongest education-labour-values mediation pattern, reflecting the role of the garment sector in transforming women's economic lives. Jakarta shows the highest modernisation-of-values scores and the most extensive use of digitally mediated family connections, perhaps reflecting Indonesia's earlier urban transition and high internet penetration. These city-specific patterns reinforce the importance of context-sensitive analysis even within broad regional comparison.

Policy implications follow from the findings. First, social protection systems should anticipate the changing structure of family support, particularly for elder care. The eldercare anxiety theme indicates that gaps in formal eldercare provision are increasingly felt by urban households, and policy investments in community-based eldercare, residential care, and support for family caregivers warrant priority. Second, female labour force participation, identified as a key mediator of value modernisation, should be supported through childcare provision, transport infrastructure, workplace flexibility, and the elimination of legal barriers. Third, urban planning that accommodates hybrid family forms (multi-locality, elastic households, digitally connected extended families) should provide flexible housing, transport, and digital connectivity. Fourth, public discourse about family change should move beyond declension narratives that treat traditional family forms as the only legitimate model and recognise the diversity of arrangements through which urban families realise care, support, and continuity.

Limitations include the cross-sectional design (with retrospective comparison subject to known recall biases), the focus on three large cities (limiting generalisation to smaller cities and rural areas), and reliance on self-reported measures of value orientations. The qualitative sample, while rich, is purposive and cannot represent the full diversity of urban family experience. Despite these limitations, the convergence of quantitative regression and mediation findings with rich qualitative themes provides a coherent and policy-relevant account of urban family transformation in three large Asian cities.

Detailed case material from the qualitative sample brings the four themes into sharper focus. A Delhi family followed across the study comprised a 78-year-old retired teacher, his 52-year-old daughter who manages a small business, and her 24-year-old daughter who works in IT and recently moved into her own apartment in a neighbouring district. The senior generation expressed both sadness about the move and pride in his granddaughter's independence. The middle generation negotiated the practical implications, including the routines of meal-sharing, religious observance, and care arrangements, while the younger generation described the move as 'natural' but maintained daily video contact. The case illustrates the negotiated-tradition theme: classical extended family residence has shifted to a distributed family configuration that preserves intergenerational tie strength through new modalities.

A Dhaka family in the qualitative sample illustrates the intersection of garment-sector employment with intergenerational dynamics. The 49-year-old mother worked in a garment factory from her twenties through her late thirties, contributing substantially to family income and supporting the education of her two daughters. The eldest daughter, now 26 and a nurse, frames her career choice as a continuation of

her mother's economic agency. The youngest daughter, 19 and a university student, articulates a stronger orientation to professional autonomy and delayed marriage. The 70-year-old grandmother, while expressing some concern about delayed marriage, also takes pride in the educational achievements of her granddaughters and recognises the contribution of her own daughter's economic agency to the family's trajectory.

A Jakarta family illustrates the digital-extended-family theme. The 73-year-old grandfather lives in his ancestral village in Central Java, while his three children and seven grandchildren live in Jakarta, Surabaya, and Kuala Lumpur. Daily WhatsApp messages, weekly video calls, and quarterly in-person visits maintain a sense of immediate family connection that the senior generation describes as 'almost like living together.' The 50-year-old daughter, who coordinates much of the digital family infrastructure, describes her role as both gratifying and burdensome. The case illustrates the hybrid-family-form theme and points to the role of digital infrastructure in shaping contemporary family arrangements.

Cross-cutting reflections on the gendered nature of family transformation indicate that women bear disproportionate responsibility for the practical work of family negotiation. Across all twenty families, the principal organisers of digital connection, the coordinators of eldercare, the mediators of intergenerational conflict, and the primary transmitters of cultural materials were predominantly women, particularly those of the middle generation. This gendered division of family work intersects with the labour market participation patterns documented in the quantitative analysis and points to the importance of social policy interventions that recognise the value of family work and reduce its disproportionate burden on women.

Religious dimensions of family transformation deserve specific attention. The Hindu, Muslim, and Christian families included in the qualitative sample exhibited common patterns in the structural dimensions of family change but distinctive patterns in the cultural materials being negotiated. Hindu families discussed the evolving significance of joint religious observance, the negotiation of dietary practices, and the changing role of family rituals. Muslim families discussed the practical organisation of religious obligations around modern work schedules, the meaning of Ramadan and Eid in dispersed family configurations, and the role of mosque-based community in supporting family practice. Christian families discussed the role of church communities in providing alternative family-like networks and the integration of religious practice with intergenerational family life. The diversity of religious negotiations underscores the importance of attending to specific cultural materials rather than treating value change as undifferentiated.

Implications for urban planning are substantial. The decline of joint family residence and the rise of hybrid family forms have implications for housing demand (more, smaller units), for public transport (multi-directional commuting), for elder-care infrastructure (community-based services), and for digital connectivity (high-quality broadband as a near-essential service). Urban planning that anticipates these patterns can support both the wellbeing of urban families and the broader sustainability of urban development. Several of the cities studied have begun to integrate family-sensitive planning into their master plans, though much remains to be done.

From a methodological standpoint, the present study illustrates both the value of mixed-methods integration and the persistent challenges of cross-city research. The quantitative regression and mediation analyses provided statistical patterns that the qualitative material both confirmed and complicated. The qualitative material identified themes (negotiated tradition, digital extended family) that the quantitative instrument did not fully capture, pointing to opportunities for instrument refinement. Future cross-city studies in the region could benefit from harmonised survey instruments developed

through regional collaboration, perhaps under the auspices of bodies such as the Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Population Research or the ASEAN Demographic Research Initiative.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the transformation of traditional family values amid rapid urbanisation in Delhi, Dhaka, and Jakarta using a mixed-methods design combining a 1,500-household survey with 60 in-depth interviews across 20 multi-generational families. The findings document substantial decline in joint family arrangements, the central role of female education and labour force participation in value modernisation, and the active negotiation of cultural materials across generations within urban families. The study contributes to the literature on family transformation by providing comparative cross-city evidence, by integrating quantitative regression and mediation with rich qualitative analysis, and by extending modernisation theory through attention to family agency. Future research could extend the analysis longitudinally, broaden the geographic scope, deepen attention to gender-diverse family forms, and integrate explicit measurement of digitally mediated family practices.

A detailed look at temporal dynamics reveals that the structural transition in family arrangements has accelerated since the early 2000s. Census and survey data points covering Delhi, Dhaka, and Jakarta indicate that the rate of decline in joint family residence was approximately 0.6 percentage points per year between 1990 and 2000, accelerating to approximately 1.4 percentage points per year between 2000 and 2023. The acceleration aligns with the broader urbanisation acceleration in the three cities, with the expansion of formal-sector employment, and with the rise of female labour force participation. Comparison with rural areas in the same countries (drawing on national surveys such as the Indian NFHS, the Bangladesh DHS, and the Indonesian IFLS) indicates that rural-urban differences in family arrangements have narrowed somewhat over the period as urbanisation has diffused outward, but the urban-rural gap remains substantial.

Patterns of internal migration shape both the structure and the meaning of urban family life. Approximately 28 per cent of Delhi residents in the sample reported having moved from outside Delhi at some point in their lives; 41 per cent of Dhaka residents reported internal migration backgrounds; 36 per cent of Jakarta residents reported similar patterns. For first-generation migrants to the cities, family ties to villages of origin remained strong, with regular remittances, frequent communication, and periodic visits. Second-generation urbanites, by contrast, exhibited weaker rural ties and stronger anchoring in the city. The intergenerational shift from first-generation to second-generation urbanisation thus represents a substantive transformation in family geography and obligation patterns.

Eldercare arrangements warrant detailed examination given the demographic trajectories of the three countries. India's population aged 60 and over is projected to reach 320 million by 2050, Bangladesh's around 35 million, and Indonesia's around 75 million. The provision of care for this rapidly expanding elderly population will require substantial expansion of formal eldercare infrastructure, given the documented decline of joint residence patterns. The eldercare anxiety theme identified in the qualitative material reflects households' present awareness of this looming challenge. Government investments in community-based eldercare, day-care centres, residential care for those without family support, and home-care subsidies for families providing care will all be needed. Insurance arrangements that recognise long-term care needs are still in early stages of development across the three countries.

The financial dimensions of intergenerational support exchange also deserve detailed analysis. Survey respondents reported on the directions and magnitudes of financial flows across generations within their families. Aggregate patterns indicated net transfers from the working-age middle generation to both the elderly senior generation (medical expenses, daily living support) and the younger generation (education, marriage, housing). The middle generation's economic burden as the 'sandwich' generation

has been documented in other Asian settings (Knodel and Ofstedal, 2003) and is reproduced in the present sample. Net transfers from the elderly to the middle and younger generations also occurred, particularly through housing equity and accumulated savings, but the typical direction was from middle to other generations.

Implications for gender policy are significant. The labour force participation pathway that connects female education to value modernisation operates through women's economic agency, which in turn depends on workplace conditions, family support arrangements, and broader social norms. Policy interventions that expand affordable childcare, support flexible work arrangements, address discrimination in hiring and promotion, and reduce safety concerns for women in urban spaces can amplify the modernisation pathway documented in the present analysis. Conversely, policy or social pressures that constrain female labour force participation can interrupt the pathway and dampen the value transformation effects that education would otherwise produce.

Comparative reflections across the three cities reveal that Delhi, Dhaka, and Jakarta occupy different positions on related but distinct urban trajectories. Delhi exhibits the most extreme demographic transition in the sample, with the highest mean age at first marriage and the lowest joint family residence share, but also the lowest female labour force participation; this configuration suggests that classical modernisation drivers are operating but that complementary factors (workplace conditions, safety, family support) lag. Dhaka exhibits a distinctive configuration in which female labour force participation has expanded faster than the broader value modernisation, perhaps reflecting the specific industrial dynamics of the garment sector and the strength of religious and cultural anchors that moderate value change. Jakarta exhibits a more balanced configuration in which both labour force participation and value modernisation have moved together, perhaps reflecting Indonesia's longer urban transition history and the role of female participation in services and public sector employment.

From a research design standpoint, the integration of quantitative and qualitative material allowed the present study to capture both pattern and meaning in ways that neither method alone could have achieved. The quantitative regression demonstrated the strength of education and labour force participation as predictors of value orientations; the qualitative material illuminated the active negotiation through which these structural conditions translated into family life. The mediation analysis showed how education effects operated through labour force participation; the case narratives showed how the labour force experience translated into household autonomy, child-rearing decisions, and intergenerational dialogue. Future research could productively extend this integration through longitudinal designs, dyadic data collection within families, and more explicit measurement of digitally mediated family practices.

A further important dimension of the analysis concerns marriage formation patterns. Mean age at first marriage in the sampled populations rose from approximately 21 years (women) and 25 years (men) in the early 1990s to 25 years (women) and 28 years (men) in 2023. The increase is most pronounced for women, narrowing the gender gap in marriage timing. Arranged marriage remains the dominant mode in Delhi and Dhaka (61 per cent and 69 per cent of recent marriages reported), although the parental role has shifted from selection to approval in many cases. In Jakarta, the pattern is more varied, with so-called 'self-chosen' marriages accounting for a majority but parental involvement remaining substantial. The interview material illuminated the active negotiation between younger and older generations over the modality of marriage decision-making, with several participants describing the development of hybrid procedures that incorporate elements of both arrangement and self-selection.

Fertility patterns provide another window on family transformation. Mean number of children per woman aged 40+ declined from 3.6 in 1990 to 2.1 in 2023 across the three city samples, with Delhi showing the steepest decline (3.4 to 1.8). The fertility transition aligns with the broader regional pattern

of declining fertility associated with urbanisation, female education, and improved access to family planning. The qualitative material revealed substantial variation in attitudes toward family size, with younger generation respondents articulating preferences for one or two children based on considerations of economic capacity, parental investment, and personal autonomy, while older generations expressed more varied views, ranging from acceptance to mild regret about the smaller family sizes.

Religious and ethnic minority experiences within the three cities warrant specific attention. In Delhi, Muslim and Christian families included in the qualitative sample described both common patterns with their Hindu neighbours and distinctive features tied to religious community life. In Dhaka, the predominantly Muslim sample included Hindu minority families whose experiences reflected the specific dynamics of minority status. In Jakarta, the qualitative sample included Christian families whose experiences reflected the diversity of the Indonesian religious landscape. While the sample sizes do not permit statistically rigorous minority-majority comparison, the qualitative material suggests that the broad patterns of family transformation operate across religious and ethnic boundaries while specific cultural materials being negotiated differ.

Implications for higher education curricula and research training are several. The transformation of urban family life is a substantial sociological and policy phenomenon that warrants dedicated attention in graduate training programmes in sociology, social policy, public health, and urban planning across the three countries. The integration of family studies with urban studies, gender studies, and demographic research could strengthen the analytical capacity available to address future challenges. Several universities in the region operate centres for family studies (the Centre for Family Studies at TISS, the Department of Sociology at the University of Dhaka, the family studies programme at Universitas Gadjah Mada) that could anchor expanded training and research collaboration.

In closing, the urban family transformation documented in this study is a major social phenomenon with implications for individual wellbeing, household welfare, urban policy, and national development. The patterns identified — structural change in family form, value modernisation mediated by education and labour participation, hybrid family arrangements, eldercare anxiety, intergenerational dialogue — collectively describe an Asian urban family in active transition. The wellbeing of the people involved depends on the success of public and private institutions in supporting families through this transition, which requires policy attention, research investment, and continued engagement with the experiences and aspirations of families themselves.

Practical recommendations for stakeholders follow directly from the empirical findings. For national governments, the priority areas are extension of social protection to cover eldercare, expansion of childcare provision, support for female labour force participation, and the integration of family-sensitive planning into urban development policy. For city governments, the priorities are housing diversity, public transport accessibility, public space for inter-generational interaction, and community-based eldercare services. For employers, the priorities are flexible work arrangements, parental leave provisions, and support for family-related care responsibilities. For civil society organisations, the priorities are advocacy for family-supportive policy, direct service provision for vulnerable families, and the documentation of community experiences to inform policy debate. For researchers, the priorities are longitudinal data collection, comparative cross-national designs, and explicit engagement with the lived experiences of urban families.

In addition to these specific recommendations, the broader implication of the present study is that the public discourse about urban family change should be enriched and complicated. Declension narratives that treat the decline of joint family residence as a loss of cultural authenticity, and progress narratives that treat the transition as straightforward modernisation, both fail to capture the active, ambivalent, and creative work that urban families are undertaking. A more nuanced public discourse,

informed by empirical research and sensitive to family agency, can support both individual wellbeing and collective decision-making about the future of urban life in the region.

Returning to the theoretical implications, the present study suggests that future work could productively develop frameworks that integrate structural (modernisation), relational (intergenerational solidarity), and agentic (negotiated tradition) elements. Such frameworks would treat structural conditions as shaping but not determining family arrangements, would attend to the multiple dimensions of intergenerational connection, and would foreground the active interpretive work of family members. The combination of comparative quantitative analysis and rich qualitative ethnography demonstrated here represents one productive approach to building such integrated frameworks.

Mental health and wellbeing dimensions of family transformation deserve targeted attention. Survey respondents who reported high levels of intergenerational tension also reported higher scores on a brief screening instrument for psychological distress, with stronger associations among female respondents and the middle generation in particular. The qualitative interview material captured the emotional labour involved in family transformation: the grief associated with the loss of older household configurations, the anxiety associated with eldercare uncertainty, and the relief associated with greater autonomy. Mental health services in urban Asia are still in early stages of development, and family-sensitive mental health support is a productive area for future investment.

Comparative reflection on the relationship between national policy and urban family life suggests that supportive policy frameworks can amplify positive transitions while permissive or punitive frameworks can exacerbate stress. The expansion of Indian, Bangladeshi, and Indonesian social protection systems over the past two decades has produced modest but meaningful improvements in household economic security, with knock-on effects for family arrangements. Targeted policy interventions — such as Bangladesh's mandatory maternity leave provisions, Indonesia's BPJS Kesehatan health insurance, and India's various social pension schemes — interact with family dynamics in specific ways. The next phase of policy development could productively integrate family-sensitive analysis into the design of social protection, urban planning, and labour market interventions.

In sum, the rapid urban transformation of South and Southeast Asia is producing one of the most consequential family transitions in human history, and the trajectory of this transition will shape the wellbeing of billions of people over the coming decades. The research community, policy makers, and civil society have an opportunity to ensure that the transition supports rather than undermines individual flourishing and intergenerational solidarity, and that the cultural materials that families value can be carried forward into new configurations of urban life.

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