

HOUSING DENSITY, MIGRATION AND FAMILY COHESION IN A TRANSITIONAL URBAN CONTEXT: EVIDENCE FROM DISTRICT CHINIOT, PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

Iqra Waqar¹, Dr. Babak Mahmood², Dr. Ayesha Chaudhry³, Jannat Junaid⁴

¹MPhil Scholar Department of Sociology Government College University Faisalabad Email:

²Professor Department of Sociology Government College University Faisalabad

³Associate Professor Department of Sociology Government College University Faisalabad

⁴Kallipolis College for Advance Studies Faisalabad,

¹iqraawaqar6@gmail.com, ²babakmahmood@gcuf.edu.pk, ³ayeshachaudhry@gcuf.edu.pk,
⁴jannatjunaid1984@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: *

Dr. Babak Mahmood

Abstract

Urban growth may affect family relationship through migration, housing conditions and changing patterns of social interaction. The present study explores migration, housing density, family cohesion and social capital among 300 urban and semi-urban households in District Chiniot, Punjab, Pakistan using a quantitative descriptive-correlational design. The data were collected through a structured face-to-face administered questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha = .847$) and analyzed using Pearson correlation, t-test, ANOVA and multiple regression. Migration had positive association with housing density ($r = .31$) and negative association with family cohesion ($r = -.22$). The housing density was negatively related with social capital ($r = -.27$) and family cohesion ($r = -.31$). Social capital highlighted a strong positive relationship with family cohesion ($r = .58$) and family cohesion also differed significantly by housing density, $F(2,297) = 14.87, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$. Regression results reflected significant effects of housing density ($\beta = .27$), migration ($\beta = .19$), technology use/modern attitudes ($\beta = .17$) and education ($\beta = .15$) whereas income was not significant. Findings of the study indicate the relationship between urban residential conditions, migration and family relational outcomes in a medium-sized Pakistani city.

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is not limited to demographic expansion; it also alters patterns of residence, social interaction, employment and family life. Changes in housing conditions and migration can affect the frequency of family interaction and the availability of everyday support. Earlier scholarship has associated urbanization with changes in family organization and reduced reliance on traditional co-residential arrangements (Gore, 1990; Phillips, 1964). More recent work has emphasized the relationship between migration, urban growth and changing family practices (Trask, 2022).

The situation in Pakistan is of particular interest since the role of the family is far from being diminished and continues to perform substantial emotional, economical and social functions. Research has documented changing patterns of family organization under conditions of modernization, migration, housing pressure and changing lifestyles (Hasan, 2010; Qadeer, 2006; Shah & Mahmood, 2024). In the

Lahore and Faisalabad areas, studies have also identified housing and urban-development pressures, although much of this literature has focused on metropolitan or large-city settings (Farah et al., 2016; Rana & Bhatti, 2018; Waseem et al., 2023).

Family cohesion is one of the key aspects of these changes. Social Capital Theory highlights the importance of trust, cooperation, mutual aid, and social support in social groups. At the level of families, such resources can be found depending on whether people live close to each other and how often they meet face-to-face (Lodhi et al., 2021; Nickols et al., 2015). In this sense, housing density is the key concept that connects the two issues and shows how the built environment affects social ties.

District Chiniot offers a good opportunity to study these relationships since it is a relatively large and developing city, where traditional family relationships are being replaced by new patterns associated with migration and industrialization. For this reason, in the present article, the author concentrates on the relationship between migration, housing density, social capital, and family cohesion, while postulating that the changes which take place in traditional families are not the subject of this article.

Theoretical Perspective

The article mainly uses the Social capital theory and the Theory of family change. The former focuses on trust, cooperation, reciprocity, and shared responsibilities, which are regarded as resources that enhance social relationships. Family members can develop these values through constant interaction and living together (Lodhi et al., 2021).

Kağıtçıbaşı's (1996) Theory of Family Change can also be applied to the given scenario. This theory provides the basis for the distinction between economic interdependence and independence and psychological or emotional interdependence. According to the hypothesis, families in modernized societies can evolve from economic and residential interdependence to a state of living independently but remaining emotionally connected. The existence of modified joint households in the Chiniot sample can be related to the theory because some family members continue to reside together and interact with each other despite living separately.

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design. Target population of this research was the households in urban and semi-urban areas of District Chiniot, Punjab. Moreover, simple random sampling was used to select 300 households. Therefore the study represents urban and semi-urban households rather than the entire rural and urban population of District Chiniot. A structured face-to-face questionnaire was used as a tool of data collection. The socio-economic and demographic questions, migration and housing characteristics and five six-item Likert-scale measures covering intergenerational relations, family cohesion, social capital, gender roles and technology use/modern attitudes were included in the instrument. Responses to the scale items ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was administered in Urdu. A pilot test involving 20 households was conducted before the main survey, and the overall reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .847$.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize household characteristics and scale scores. Pearson correlation was employed to examine relationships among migration, housing density, social capital and family cohesion. An independent-samples t-test compared social capital between family-structure groups, while one-way ANOVA with Tukey HSD comparisons examined differences in family cohesion across housing-density categories. Multiple regression was used to examine the independent contribution of migration, housing density, income, education and technology use/modern attitudes to family cohesion. Statistical significance was assessed at $p < .05$.

Results

Household and Housing Profile

The mean household size was 6.4 members (SD = 2.1). Two-generation households constituted 44.0% of the sample, while 30.0% included three or more generations. Nuclear households represented 35.0%, joint households 28.0%, extended households 18.0%, and modified joint households 19.0%.

Migration was common in the study population: 168 households (56.0%) reported a migration background, compared with 132 (44.0%) non-migrant households. Regarding housing tenure, 63.0% owned their homes, 29.0% rented, and 8.0% shared housing with relatives. Housing density was low for 25.0% of households, moderate for 55.0%, and high for 20.0%.

Table 1: Migration and Housing Characteristics of Households (N = 300)

Variable	Category	n	%
Migration background	Migrant household	168	56.0
	Non-migrant household	132	44.0
Housing tenure	Owned	189	63.0
	Rented	87	29.0
	Shared with relatives	24	8.0
Housing density	Low	75	25.0
	Moderate	165	55.0
	High	60	20.0

Descriptive Characteristics of Family Relations

The five subscales showed moderate-to-positive mean scores. Technology use/modern attitudes had the highest mean (M = 3.78, SD = 0.69), followed by gender roles (M = 3.61, SD = 0.72), family cohesion (M = 3.55, SD = 0.81), intergenerational relations (M = 3.42, SD = 0.78), and social capital (M = 3.30, SD = 0.85). Reliability coefficients for the subscales ranged from .77 to .83.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Family-Related Measures (N = 300)

Subscale	Items	M	SD	α
Intergenerational Relations	6	3.42	0.78	.81
Family Cohesion	6	3.55	0.81	.83
Social Capital	6	3.30	0.85	.79
Gender Roles	6	3.61	0.72	.77
Technology Use/Modern Attitudes	6	3.78	0.69	.80

Relationships among Migration, Housing and Family Cohesion

Migration status was positively associated with housing density ($r = .31, p < .001$). Migration was negatively associated with social capital ($r = -.19, p < .01$) and family cohesion ($r = -.22, p < .001$). Housing density was negatively associated with social capital ($r = -.27, p < .001$) and family cohesion ($r = -.31, p < .001$). Social capital showed a comparatively strong positive association with family cohesion ($r = .58, p < .001$).

Table 3: Pearson Correlations among Migration, Housing Density, Social Capital and Family Cohesion

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Migration Status	—	.31***	-.19**	-.22***
2. Housing Density	.31***	—	-.27***	-.31***
3. Social Capital	-.19**	-.27***	—	.58***

4. Family Cohesion	-.22***	-.31***	.58***	—
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Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Social Capital and Family Structure

Social capital differed significantly between the two family-structure groupings. Joint/extended households reported a mean social capital score of **3.58 (SD = 0.79)** compared with **3.07 (SD = 0.83)** among nuclear/modified joint households. The difference was statistically significant, $t(298) = 5.41$, $p < .001$, with Cohen's $d = 0.63$.

Housing Density and Family Cohesion

Family cohesion varied significantly according to housing density. Low-density households had a mean cohesion score of 3.81, compared with 3.52 among moderate-density households and 3.09 among high-density households. The overall difference was significant, $F(2, 297) = 14.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$. Tukey comparisons showed significant differences between low and moderate density ($MD = 0.29$, $p = .012$), low and high density ($MD = 0.72$, $p < .001$), and moderate and high density ($MD = 0.43$, $p = .001$).

Table 4: Family Cohesion by Housing Density

Housing Density	n	M	SD
Low	75	3.81	0.70
Moderate	165	3.52	0.78
High	60	3.09	0.84

Note. $F(2, 297) = 14.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$.

Predictors of Family Cohesion

The multiple regression model was statistically significant, $F(5, 294) = 22.84$, $p < .001$, explaining 28% of the variance in family cohesion ($R^2 = .28$; adjusted $R^2 = .27$). Housing density ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$), migration status ($\beta = .19$, $p = .001$), technology use/modern attitudes ($\beta = .17$, $p = .002$), and education ($\beta = .15$, $p = .007$) were statistically significant predictors. Monthly income was not independently significant ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .478$). All VIF values were below 1.34, indicating no substantial multicollinearity problem in the reported model.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Predicting Family Cohesion (N = 300)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	VIF
Migration Status	0.31	0.09	.19	3.44	.001	1.21
Housing Density	0.42	0.08	.27	5.25	< .001	1.34
Monthly Income	-0.05	0.07	-.04	-0.71	.478	1.18
Education Level	0.19	0.07	.15	2.71	.007	1.26
Technology Use	0.25	0.08	.17	3.13	.002	1.15

Note. Dependent variable = Family Cohesion. $R^2 = .28$; Adjusted $R^2 = .27$; $F(5, 294) = 22.84$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

The findings indicate that family cohesion in urban and semi-urban Chiniot is related to both residential and migratory conditions. More than half of the households reported a migration background, and migration was positively associated with housing density. This pattern is consistent with the broader literature that identifies migration as an important mechanism of urban social change (Hasan, 2010;

Trask, 2022). Similar migration processes have been documented in Faisalabad, where socioeconomic and cultural conditions influence migration behavior (Farah et al., 2012).

Housing density demonstrated a significant relationship with family cohesion. The progressive difference in mean cohesion across low-, moderate- and high-density households provides household-level evidence for the relevance of residential conditions to family relationships. Earlier studies of Pakistan have discussed housing shortages and urban planning problems as important features of urbanization (Haider & Badami, 2010; Malik & Wahid, 2014; Rana & Bhatti, 2018). The present findings add a relational dimension by linking housing density statistically with family cohesion.

The association between social capital and family cohesion was also substantial. Moreover, joint/extended households reported higher social capital scores than nuclear/modified joint households. This corresponds with the argument that co-residential family arrangements can provide opportunities for shared responsibilities, interaction and support. Lodhi et al. (2021) similarly identified differences in quality-of-life outcomes between joint and nuclear family arrangements in Pakistan.

Education was positively associated with intergenerational relations, gender roles and family cohesion. Specifically, education correlated with intergenerational relations at $r = .24$, gender roles at $r = .34$, and family cohesion at $r = .16$. Monthly Income showed weaker associations meanwhile Migration was negatively related to Intergenerational relations and family cohesion but not significantly associated with gender roles. These findings indicate that different aspects of urban transition may influence distinct family processes and hence, that one cannot expect a single pattern of change.

The regression results also demonstrate that the family cohesion is correlated with a number of factors on multiple levels. Housing density, migration, technology use/modern attitudes and education had statistically significant predictors, while income was not an independent variable that predicted cohesion after controlling for the other factors. It is also notable that the cross-sectional design does not allow establishing causal relationships. Therefore, the observed associations should be considered within the framework of the given households and not as a general tendency that urbanization factors determine changes in cohesion. The thesis also acknowledges this limitation and specifies that the analysis would require a longitudinal design to determine time-series associations.

Conclusion

The above study established many of the relationships between migration, housing density, social capital and family cohesion among 300 urban and semi-urban households in the District Chiniot. Migration was associated with increased housing density and decreased family cohesion, while housing density was significantly related to both social capital and family cohesion. Family cohesion was also significantly different across housing-density categories. The regression model accounted for 28% of the variance in family cohesion, with housing density, migration, technology use/modern attitudes and education as significant predictors.

The results of the paper add local evidence at a household level from a moderately sized Pakistani city. Instead of viewing urbanization as a unified process, the results suggest that the spatial context, exposure to migration, education, and modernization through technology each have a differential impact on familial domains. Furthermore, by design, the results are based on a cross-sectional design, and thus causal claims must be tempered.

Future studies should consider using a longitudinal design, include rural households in the investigation, and examine family type as a direct dependent variable by means of multinomial or other regression analyses. Comparative research in several medium-sized cities in Pakistan would also help in determining whether the associations found in Chiniot are specific to that region or common to a number of communities.

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