



FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN INDIA IN THE POST ECONOMIC REFORM ERA: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

Kahini Palit

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, School of Liberal Arts and Culture Studies, Adamas University, Kolkata 700126, West Bengal, India & PhD Research Scholar, Burdwan University

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra10416>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra10416

ABSTRACT

The post-economic reform era in India gave rise to several changes in Indian society. With rapid changes in the economy and the job market, family relationships started to change. The tight bond between the spouses and the importance of family time got replaced with increased time and effort given to advance in one's career in the office. The new jobs introduced in the post-reform era offered increased salaries on one hand, and on the other demanded more time and effort from the employees. The resultant effect led to a reduction of family time, intimacy of spousal relationships and bonding, and giving rise to a more individualized existence.

KEYWORDS- *Economic reform and family in India, Family relationships in India after 1990s, Post economic reform era and intimate relationships, Relationship crisis in the new economy*

INTRODUCTION

Economic reform in India brought a vast amount of changes in life and living of Indians. The changes are noteworthy, especially for the middle class. Those among the middle class who could cope with the changes in the market and the economy could build a better life for themselves, as the new economy offered better and more diverse avenues for income. The economic well-being associated with economic reform in India was accompanied by several changes, including the crisis in relationships of Indian middle-class families.

The new types of jobs and job demands are very much different than the jobs 40 years back, or before the economic reform of the 1990s. A comparative study between the jobs and occupations of people before and after the 1990s would reveal a different picture of the types of responsibilities demanded by the jobs. The working hours have notably increased in the post-reform era, which has started to affect relationships within the families.

Be it a single earning family or a dual-income one, it is increasingly being found that intimacy within spousal relationships is waning, and the distance increasing gradually. This distance might be attributed to the fast pace of lifestyle that India has achieved, owing to the pumping of a major amount of investments in infrastructural development in India in the post-economic reform era. There has been a noteworthy change in the salary structure too, with the private sector often paying a much higher amount than the government sector. The increased annual income of the families curiously has not

given way to a tight relationship with increased mutual understanding and love, instead, owing to the insane work pressure and official and unofficial working hours, targets, deadlines, and performance reviews- a major portion of life becomes simply job oriented, with almost no time left to give to one's spouse. This creates gradual distancing in the relationship, where each spouse remains engaged in official work even much after official hours, taking home work every day. As spouses spend more time in work, the time given for the relationship decreases. This has risen almost to the level of a societal crisis.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the current research was in-depth interviews. 30 respondents were chosen on the basis of Purposive sampling. The sensitive nature of the research needed a method of data collection where respondents would open up and talk about the intricacies of their family life with the researcher. Purposive sampling was chosen so that the respondents are representative of the target population. The interviews were conducted as per the time and place chosen by the respondents, and according to their convenience. All respondents interviewed were employed, either in the government sector or in the private sector, most working six days a week. It was difficult for the respondents sometimes to meet the time and date for the interview, but despite the handicaps, almost all the interviews could be conducted in a hassle-free manner. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour, sometimes more, depending on how in-depth the



respondents wanted to talk. The interviews were not conducted in a question/answer manner, so as to give the respondents the time to narrate their experiences in detail without a hurry.

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data pointed towards several findings, the primary among which is that as affluence increased in the family due to growth in the economy, changes in family values resulted, and so did the importance of close and intimate family relationships. Family relationships were majorly affected due to the growing engagements in workplaces, and the importance of the ideology of competition in the workplaces. Sometimes, the incentives were directly related to the 'extra' work one did in the office during after-office hours, or when one met the deadlines effectively. This is sometimes accomplished at a lofty personal cost, like missing special family occasions or canceling family trips. Even sometimes, carrying laptop and webcams to family trips, always being ready for emergency meetings at the office.

Another major issue uncovered in the research was that career mobility has had an effect on the stability of family life. People moved from one job to another, sometimes to a different city or a different country altogether. The relocation of a spouse created strains on family relationships, creating physical distance between the husband and the wife. Mostly, the responsibility of the kids remained with the wife, who took the kids with her if she needs to move due to the demands of her job. In the case of single-income families where the husband was the breadwinner, he took his wife and kids with him to the relocated place. In that case, only due to her husband's relocation, the wife was made to leave her parents, relatives and friends, and resettle in the new place. This often created major strain in the relationship, as the entire family coped with the changed circumstances.

The fieldwork revealed that rapid changes in the Indian economy have often improved the economic condition of many families, offering new types of jobs and pay scales previously unimaginable. Nevertheless, the new economy had led to instability in the job market, as it had reduced the public sector recruitment to a minimum whereas giving birth to huge initiatives in the private sector. But private-sector recruitments were unstable, and any change in market situations gave rise to a heavy amount of job cuts. Thus, private sector employees, although often enjoyed a good pay package, were often prone to change jobs, or exerted themselves to a breaking point in order to prove themselves. This further enhanced the competitive environment of the workplace. The result of these changes, and the stress they created first and foremost exerted a major effect on family life and relationship.

The increased stress due to job insecurity on one hand and the consumption practices in the new economy on the other hand affected intimate relationships in a deeper way. Respondents lamented that even after the provision of leave for holidays, it was almost impossible to quietly enjoy one- or two-week long holidays, as the husband's or the wife's busy work life barely left them alone, phones, emails, and

WhatsApp messages kept interfering. In the midst of these, time for the family got reduced, sometimes up to the level that the spouse was happy to pay for certain services for which he/she did not have time. But the respondents often claimed that paying for the services further reduced the spouse's engagement in the family, and thus increased the distance in the spousal relationship.

CONCLUSION

The present research affirmed that with the economic reform, came the changes in lifestyle and values. With the infusion of major funds into the market, the importance of affluence and spending power increasingly took the center stage of importance in the everyday living of the middle-class Indians. The job market changed rapidly, with new and improved jobs on offer. But life was in no way spared of job-related stress. With the instability of the private sector and the increased expenditure, occupational hazards rather increased. poverty and unemployment rather than decreasing were rather enhanced in the new economy. Price hikes became a common phenomenon, and so was the struggle to meet daily expenses. But most of all, the values associated with the importance of family have changed. This is evident by the increasing number of broken relationships, separations, and divorces in India. It is alarming, since, with the importance and care for relationships reduced, society would head towards an individualized existence.

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