

# The Shift of Family Role and Function in Atomistic Family in Urban Society

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**Abstract:** The role and function of family in the social life are very crucial. However, globalization and modernization have brought changes on the variety of family models, including the atomistic family, in which individuality is likely more important than the family ties. Nowadays, in postmodern societies it is easy to find families which members are not living in the same house. This research aims to describe the implementation of socialization function in atomistic families. This research employed qualitative method with purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews of six families, in which spouses live separately. Informants interviewed live in Surabaya and their spouses live outside Surabaya. The findings reveal that globalization brings immense social change including changes in family structure. The shift of family structure from extended family (traditional society) leads to nuclear family (modern society) and in postmodern era shifting to atomistic family. The shift of family structure brings consequences on the shifting role and function of family, especially in case of child care and socialization. Atomistic family requires generalized others that are parents, baby sitter, household assistants and neighbours. More economically established families have a greater chance of meeting face-to-face with family members than the lower-class families.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The family framework applies influence of high-profile people towards the youth development, with implications of teenager's adjustment (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Healthy family bond leads to diminished risk of teenager problems such as sexual behaviour and downheartedness (Greenberg and Lippold, 2013). Family bond is also connected with health and happiness (Lippold et al., 2014). Bold and vigorous childhood creates healthy adulthood (Repetti et al., 2002). Family has the role not only to reduce the teenager's development risk as well as support them from the impact of the risk, but also constrain their healthy development (Fraser et al., 1999). The success of family-based prevention programs may lead to teenager's happiness and reduce their risky behaviour (Greenberg and Lippold, 2013; Van Ryzin et al., 2015).

The infrastructure of couple and family relationship has shifted from social and institutional obligations to companionship and love and also to self-fulfillment and life enrichment (Amato et al.,

2007). Furthermore, it guides to the emergence of family structure demographic trends which include relationship dissolution and re-partnership, cohabitation, non-marital childbearing, and multiple-partner fertility (Brown et al., 2016).

According to Zimmerman (2008), family, marriage and divorce are not taboo to discuss in a modern society. This is the underlying concept of the atomistic family. Based on a study of the sociological history of family development, Puolimatka (2017) argues that negative educational outcomes in the family is one of the foundations for the formation of family atomization structures. Misguidance in raising children may result in their becoming rebels and having negative personalities. When the norm in marriage is broken, the identity and rights of the child are taken away. It might be one of the factors leading children to grow up as a rebellious generation without a strong sense of identity.

Zimmerman (2008) adds that in the second decade of the 19th century America and Britain reacted to the revolution in France. The change had

an impact on the concept of family. The change also took place in Greece and Rome. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries the concept of family in society has led to the destruction of family ties. Family relationships are no longer the main ones, but the ability of the individual takes precedence.

The study of the family has been conducted by a number of researchers. However, the study of atomistic family has not been fully explored by previous researchers. Recent urbanization and industrialization have brought about the variety of family structures. The family structure undergoes a shift, from extended family to traditional society to the nuclear family in modern society and then to atomistic family in the postmodern era. In the atomistic family, people likely have more importance than family ties. Nowadays, in postmodern societies, it is easy to find families who are not living in the same house. Atomistic families have consequences for changing family roles and functions.

The condition of families whose members live separately might challenge our understanding and perception of the family. According to the United Nation's Preamble of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is stated that the family functions as the basic nature of the children's personality development insisting on the parental advisory in transmitting such values and norms (The United Nations, 1989). This provision implicitly requires the full presence of the parents which marks and ensures the work of cultural transmission in the family. Nevertheless, it might be in contrast with the daily practical experiences. In the 20th century the world witnessed dramatic changes of the form of family life since the new forms of relations, the opportunity for jobs in particular place, and technological advance undermine such single conceptual understanding of the family and make it less standardized (Mortelmans et al, 2016). It thus requires attention to the extent to which the new forms of family produce daily experiences which are influential in the sustainable function of the family as the social apparatus for the cultural transmission.

Previous academic works have tried to deal with this issue. Andresen et al. (2012) suggested that children who grow up with their parents tend to have higher well-being index than those who live in separated family. This in some degrees create children's personality which may affect their performances in relation to the satisfaction toward members of their family. Moreover, in order to analyze youth behaviour, Ermischa and Gambetta (2010) imply that children who used to live

separately from their parents are more susceptible to behavior problems. It is due to their reliances on the trustworthiness outside their own families.

This article emphasizes the important role of the family in the social life regardless of what kind of social changes that occur. The sociological approach employed in this model starts from the notion that basically people tend to live together in a particular form of a group. This approach then stresses on the process of the social interaction in which members interplay in such interaction and influence one another among individuals, individuals and groups, and among the groups. Moreover, a family is an element of the social structure to which other social institutions rest their existence. In recent urban societies, families have to choose to live separately: husbands, wives, and children live in different houses. This study aims to explore how people experiences the atomistic family models related to their social functions in transmitting norms and values of the society within the family.

## 2 METHODS

This research employed qualitative method with purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews of six families, in which spouses live separately. Informants interviewed live in Surabaya dan their spouses live outside Surabaya. The choice of informants was based on the classification of family income per month. The six informants are two middle-class housewives, two middle-class women working in the formal sector, and two women from the working-class family employed in the informal sector. After the editing and classification process, the data were then analyzed and interpreted.

## 3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Zimmerman introduces his formulation on the cycle of family changes in three stages: trustee family, domestic family, and atomistic family (Goode 1995). The trustee family refers to the condition where the family performs state-like functions which exercise their power to control and oversee the family members. In addition, the domestic family situates the balance between state and society; the state and family share the influence among each other while actually state has already gained control over family members. In the atomistic family, the

state has infinite power because of the decreasing family control and the strong state position within society in the one hand and the spread of individual philosophy within society in the other hand.

The atomistic family might similarly consist of the husbands, wives, and the children; however, the relation among them has no longer produced the meaning of the family as it did before but it has only produced an atomized individual which moves in its cycles. Nevertheless, taking this model for granted is quite problematic since it stands upon the simplified single assumption of the nuclear family.

In addition to that phenomena, several studies show different features. Despite the problem of its perspective, the path to probe recent family changes by suggesting the involvement of other parties such as extended families and colleagues in parenting, allowing the working of alloparenting. It is likely suitable in the more complex societies, in which one of the features is multiple partnership system extending the family ties beyond the conventional nuclear and extended family model. Affirming this approach, Meehan et al. (2013) expand the alloparenting model by showing that in recent cases where allomaternal seems hard to practice, the mother's ability to delegate her parenting task determines whether the alloparenting works or not. Indeed, choosing grandmother for doing the mothering task is the best option since the grandmother is categorized as the most important allocareer (Meehan et al., 2013).

According to the framework above, this study points out that in the atomistic families where husbands and wives live separately there are various means carried out to preserve the household. The direct meeting might be the most chosen solution. It varies from weekly, monthly, and even a half-yearly meeting. Yet this option depends on the economic condition of the family. For the higher economic level families, the direct meeting is more frequent instead of the lower ones. In addition, they also keep communicating by phone and other social media.

Based on the interviews, the atomistic family illuminate's various experiences from six atomistic families living in Surabaya. An informant from middle-class housewives, said that she had to intensely adopt to her family life when she married to an army officer. Long distance relationship with her husband was the risk she had to take. She only strengthens herself and fully trusts her husband. She believes that when her husband is at home, he belongs to her but when he is far away in his duty, he belongs to God.

Other informants from the working class family employed in the informal sector imply different impression to live in the atomistic family. Simply extracting, love and affection between the pairs are seemingly the keys to undergo such atomistic family life. They set pairs' psychological nature enabling them to accept any condition of each other. In an atomistic family whose economic condition is weak, the pair choose patience regarding their financial problems while the distance is still separating them. The pair feels *ikhlas* to face this condition. *Ikhlas* is an emic faith-based cultural concept in Islamic tradition expressing the acceptance of any conditions and problems in life and the belief that there would be a good time in the near future as God has promised. In this atomistic family, an informant who currently works in Surabaya has to live modestly to save his money for his wife in Pacitan. Away from his family is something he does not want, but he is *ikhlas* for making money in other places.

The job is seemingly the major cause of the atomistic family engendering the various form of experiences. However, it is not only related to financial problem of the family. More than this, the working career can also be important. Although financial factor is not a problem, the career might necessitate someone to live away from his family. An informant from middle-class women working in the formal sector said that she has to be apart from her husband when he was appointed to the higher position in his institution. As her husband had more income, the distance was no longer a big problem. She usually brought their children to visit her husband and had holiday there. The husband's job might separate the pair and children but their feeling was closer since they could manage interactions even they were away from each other. The hardest time, however, did occur when the wife was in an urgent situation which emotionally demanded the husband's presence. It was during the pregnancy that most women felt very weak. At that time, the women frequently wished their husbands to get jobs closer to their houses even though they had actually understood that their wishes were hardly fulfilled. Overall, although both husband and wife have jobs, they must limit their living expenditures as long as they live separately. They believe that staying in different place and house means they have cover the cost of two kitchens.

Economic factor, particularly a job or career, is the main reason of atomistic family. It occurs when both husbands and wives engage in the labour market that might necessarily ask them to live in different places. This is potential for the emergence

of a new family model shifting the conventional type where the pair must live in the same house as it did in the past. This recent phenomenon symptomizes the family across the different economic classes resulting various experiences and models of interaction. This new economic-based impetus and desire have changed the meaning of the marriage and its functions and have shifted the traditional perspective of human personality. Moreover, it has also altered the meaning of happiness from which individuals legitimize the fulfilment of their own desire. Hence, it consequentially changes the structure and functions of the family (Khairuddin, 1997). Indeed, the blood-tied parents are no longer the children's allocareer. Their parenting functions have been extended to broader parties either within the extended family such as the grandmother, grandfather, uncle, and aunt, or outside the family relation including friend, colleague, and the babysitter.

In doing her function in her family, an informant confessed that due to frequent separation from her husband she used to manage her household solely by herself. When her children were underage, her parents helped raised her children with the assistance of a housemaid. Since her parents did not help her anymore, she took care of the children by herself, with the help of her housemaid in managing her house. In doing so, she allocates a few hours in a day to spend with her children. Giving much advice is the way she transmits values and norms. Relatives like uncles and aunts also help in transferring values and norms through pieces of advice. The other informant also shares similar mothering experiences. In fact, she used to ask her mother-in-law in assisting her taking care of her children when she was on duty.

The involvement of mother or father in law is important, particularly when wife's parents are absent. A wife who worked as a factory worker in Tangerang shared their story. Her parents used to help when she left for work. Yet it was not for long until they passed away. Her mother in law then came and helped raise her children. However, functions of the mother in law were limited only to the domestic matters including parenting, managing the house when she worked, and so on. She and her husband had to cover her financial needs. Sometimes relatives came to help but not as frequent as the mother in law. From these stories, it is worth to note that while the role of the extended family members is very important but it is only for those who live in closer places.

Relationships within the family are important for the development of children's well-being, as well as for their evaluations of their family and their overall life satisfaction. Children living in separated families tend to be less satisfied with the people they live with and their family life. This trend was found in all participant countries, although it was less prevalent in Israel and Algeria. The discussion offers several possible explanations to the findings, and emphasizes that the source of the differences may be complex and may include macro and micro explanations (Dinisman et al., 2017).

The role of relatives is less significant for the atomistic family who lives away from their extended families. The distance is the only reason why they are less functioning. Furthermore, neighbours or babysitters are influential to provide help for the atomistic family. Based on the interview, an informant who lived in Surabaya felt that the role of their extended family was less important in helping her compared to the role of her neighbours. When she was at her office, her neighbour kept informing her about her children in her home. Though it seems limited, to her the neighbours were very helpful and she became less worried. In addition to the neighbours, two housemaids she employed were also important. Their tasks were managing her house such as cleaning the floor, cooking, washing the clothes, and the more importantly taking care of her children, including taking them to school. The relatives sometimes visited her house but in particular occasions only.

Those experiences describe an important message that theoretically needs more attention. In the patriarchal societies, the division of labour places women mostly in the domestic domain where their tasks are parenting. In contrast, the emergence of the atomistic family seemingly shifts the meaning of parenting and consequentially challenges such division. The women's engagement in the labour market has expanded the role of broader parties in doing the household task. Relatives, neighbours, housemaids are among which the alloparenting could possibly work.

Sociologically, there is a shift regarding the role and the function of a family in this atomistic model. In the conventional household, the role of the extended family is significant in covering the family needs, the reinforcement of the family role and function, from the production, distribution, and consumption. Yet in the modern era, the extended family is less important when the concept of nuclear family changes the social landscape of modern societies, where the involvement of broader family

is less important. The pairs prefer to live separated rather than living together among their extended family.

Nowadays when human mobility's increase, the atomistic family is likely suitable since it gives more chance to the individual to meet their desires. Women can possibly reach their career as high as their husband's. They are no longer tied to the traditional division on who deserve to work in a public space and who have to stay in domestic domain. When the children come into their life, they delegate their task back to the extended family members to transmit the values and norms. Moreover, when the extended family members are absent, the broader parties such as neighbours, babysitters, and housemaids fill this space.

This study thus shows that the social network becomes an important aspect in the current societies, particularly for those who live in the atomistic family. As Meehan and Hawks (2014) points out that in Africa grandmother holds important role for the parenting. But when she is absent, the broader social network will change her task. In addition, to highlight the re-functioning of the extended family among the recent parenting models, this study also shows that neighbours who actually have no blood-tied relation and never gain any economic profit are involved in the alloparent role of the atomistic family. Conceptually this fact indicates the extension of the kinship beyond conventional understanding which is mainly based on blood-tied relation. The recent urban societies tend to develop the kinship based on geographical aspect, in this case, the neighbourhood. It is understandable that most of them are migrants who come to the city for economic reasons. They are far away from their family, both nuclear and extended, and building closer relation with the neighbours is the most common option. In doing so, the primordialism affects their preference in which people tend to build the relationship with neighbours who come from similar places. It is because the similar experience to be a migrant and the primordial feeling facilitates their emotional and builds the sense of belonging to each other. This construction, however, encourage people to take care of each other even though they have no economic profit from this practice.

The shift of family structure based on the form of society can be divided into 3. The family structure has shifted, from extended family to traditional society to nuclear family in modern society and to atomistic family in postmodern era.

The existence of families in atomistic family is mostly found especially among the migrants in the

city of Surabaya. This results in a shift in the role and function of the family. The shift mostly involves many parties. For non-migrants, large families function to replace the roles and functions of parents while working. For migrant neighbours, baby sitters become generalized others to substitute parents. In this case, technology plays a role to help parents in controlling the child while being cared for by the maids, babysitters and neighbours. For example, the use of cell phones, WhatsApp, Webcam, Skype, Black Berry Messenger, Video Call and other social media become means for parents to control the children. The use of this technology is necessary because parents in the atomistic family cannot directly supervise their children every day. The responsibility for parenting is temporarily transferred to the generalized others who are trusted by parents to supervise the children during work time. In the atomistic family, parents become part-time parents because they spend some time outdoors. Technology not only gives a positive impact on the shift in family structure. With the growth of information and communication technology, the use of technology by children must also be controlled so that children do not perform actions that deviate from social norms.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

The pair in a family ideally lives in the same house. Globalization brings immense social change including changes in family structure. The shift of family structure from extended family (traditional society) leads to nuclear family (modern society) and in postmodern era shifting to atomistic family. The shift of family structure brings consequences on the shifting role and function of family, especially in case of child care and socialization. Atomistic family requires generalized others that are parents, baby sitter, household assistants and neighbours. More economically established families have a greater chance of meeting face-to-face with family members than the lower-class families.

Yet globalization, industrialization and modernization have caused the increased number of women who have the substantial task in a public space instead of staying in the domestic one. Due to this demand, the pair have to live separately in the different houses and even cities. Commitment, trust, and devotion become the basic elements for the pair in choosing to live in this atomistic family. Interactions among the family members are thus very limited. This distinguishes the atomistic family

with the other models. It changes the role and function of the family itself. It necessitates the involvement of other parties in managing the house and parenting the children. In addition to the extended family, other parties outside the blood-tied relation might be involved such as the neighbours and babysitters. Finally, atomistic families still need the social roles of extended families and social networks in their neighbourhoods. Social control is no longer done by parents, but also by others in socializing children to have a good personality and character.

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