

The Evolution of Patriarchal Structures in Contemporary Families: A Qualitative Inquiry

William. Russell¹, Yaliu. Yang^{1*}

¹ Marriage and Family Therapy Department, Iona College, New Rochelle, NY, United States

* Corresponding author email address: yaliuyang@iona.edu

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The patriarchal family structure has been a dominant societal framework, influencing gender roles and family dynamics across cultures. However, contemporary societal shifts, including changes in economic conditions, cultural norms, and gender expectations, have begun to challenge and reshape these traditional structures. This study aims to explore the evolution of patriarchal structures in contemporary families, focusing on how these changes impact authority dynamics, economic influences, and cultural and social norms within family units.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 25 participants from diverse backgrounds to gather in-depth insights into the shifting patriarchal dynamics within families. Theoretical saturation was achieved, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the themes. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and subthemes related to the evolution of patriarchal structures.

Findings: The analysis revealed three main themes: Changing Dynamics of Authority, Economic Influences on Patriarchy, and Cultural and Social Norms. Under the Changing Dynamics of Authority, findings highlighted a trend towards joint decision-making, redistribution of gender roles, and new conflict resolution strategies. Economic Influences on Patriarchy underscored the role of financial independence in challenging traditional norms, with significant changes observed in household economy management and the impact of economic crises on family roles. Cultural and Social Norms revealed shifts in perceptions of masculinity and femininity, the influence of marriage and family traditions, the role of religion, education, and the impact of media and technology on family structures.

Conclusion: This study demonstrates that patriarchal structures in contemporary families are undergoing significant evolution. Economic autonomy, cultural shifts, and changing gender roles play pivotal roles in this transformation. The findings suggest a move towards more egalitarian family structures, where traditional patriarchal authority is being renegotiated in response to contemporary societal changes.

Keywords: Patriarchal structures, Family dynamics, Economic influences, Cultural norms, Gender roles.

1 Introduction

The evolution of patriarchal structures within contemporary families represents a critical area of inquiry in the sociological study of gender and family dynamics. This complex transformation is not merely a shift in power dynamics but a reflection of broader socio-economic, cultural, and environmental changes impacting the fabric of familial relationships. In this regard, Ahmed (2020) elucidates on the gendered dimensions of migration, highlighting how the absence of male members in Pakistani families due to migration patterns has left women in complex positions of both empowerment and vulnerability (Ahmed, 2020). This dichotomy provides a pertinent backdrop to our exploration of evolving patriarchal norms, suggesting that changes in family dynamics can both challenge and reinforce traditional gender roles. Similarly, Bereng (2021) delves into the manifestations of patriarchal ideology within educational settings, offering insights into how female leadership navigates patriarchal constraints (Bereng, 2021). These studies underline the pervasive nature of patriarchal ideologies across different spheres of life, extending from the private domain of families to public and professional arenas.

In examining the economic dimensions of patriarchal structures, Hoang and Yeoh (2011) highlight the phenomenon of "left-behind" husbands, resulting from the rising trend of breadwinning wives. This shift not only questions the traditional gender roles prescribed by patriarchal norms but also illuminates the economic underpinnings of gendered power dynamics within families (Hoang & Yeoh, 2011). Hu (2018) further contributes to this dialogue by analyzing the impact of family structure on children's housework time in post-reform China, revealing how economic reforms and the consequent shifts in family structure influence gender roles and expectations (Hu, 2018).

The intersectionality of violence, gender, and familial roles is further examined by Dekel, Abrahams, and Andipatin (2018), who investigate the tragic outcomes of deeply ingrained patriarchal norms leading to violence against women and children. This research underscores the urgent need to understand the mechanisms of patriarchal structures that perpetuate violence and inequality within the sanctity of what should be protective and nurturing family environments (Dekel et al., 2018). Moreover, Fincher and Thornhill's (2012) exploration of in-group assortative sociality through the lens of parasite-stress theory offers a

unique perspective on the evolutionary aspects of patriarchal systems. Their work suggests that strong family ties and heightened religiosity, often associated with patriarchal norms, can be understood as adaptive responses to environmental stresses, thus providing a broader ecological and evolutionary context to the discussion of family dynamics (Fincher & Thornhill, 2012).

James-Hawkins and Qutteina (2016) bring to light the conflicts young Arab women face amidst rapid changes to normative gender roles, portraying the "patriarchal bargain" as a negotiation between traditional expectations and modern aspirations. This concept of negotiation and adaptation is critical to understanding the resilience and malleability of patriarchal structures in the face of modernity (James-Hawkins & Qutteina, 2016). Karim (2006) offers a sobering view on the relationship between men's substance abuse and domestic violence, a testament to the destructive capabilities of unchallenged patriarchal norms (Karim, 2006). The collective insights from Lilly, McKinley, Knipp, and Liddell (2021), and McHale, Crouter, and Whiteman (2003) provide a multidimensional view of gender relations and the development of gender roles within familial and communal contexts (Lilly et al., 2021; McHale et al., 2003). These studies emphasize the importance of collaborative gender relations and the social contexts of gender development, respectively, shedding light on the potential for egalitarian structures within families.

Qi (2014) discusses the evolution of filial obligation in contemporary China, offering a cultural lens through which to view the shifting expectations and responsibilities within family units. This cultural perspective is crucial for understanding the specific ways in which patriarchal norms are being renegotiated in different societies (Qi, 2014). Salem and Yount (2019), and Sana and Massey (2005) explore the structural accommodations of patriarchy in the workplace and the impact of migration on family structures, respectively, further broadening the scope of this inquiry into the intricate ways in which economic, social, and cultural factors intersect to shape, challenge, and sometimes reinforce patriarchal family structures (Salem & Yount, 2019; Sana & Massey, 2005).

Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on the evolution of patriarchal structures within contemporary families. By situating the lived experiences of individuals within the broader socio-economic, cultural, and theoretical contexts provided by the aforementioned studies, this research endeavors to uncover the multifaceted and

dynamic nature of patriarchal systems and their impact on family dynamics in the modern world.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the evolution of patriarchal structures in contemporary families. Our approach aimed to understand the nuanced dynamics and perspectives that characterize this evolution. Given the complexity and depth of the subject, a qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate to capture the rich, detailed narratives of individuals experiencing these societal structures.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse range of experiences and perspectives regarding patriarchal structures within families. The criteria for selection included individuals over 18 years of age, coming from varied socio-economic backgrounds, and representing different family structures. We aimed for a balanced representation of genders, ages, and cultural backgrounds to reflect the diversity of contemporary society. The recruitment process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, ensuring that no new themes were emerging from the data collection, and the sample size was deemed adequate to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, their role in it, and the confidentiality measures in place to protect their identity and personal information. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the commencement of the interviews. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any adverse consequences.

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Semi-Structured Interview

Data were collected exclusively through semi-structured interviews, allowing for both depth and flexibility in responses. The interview guide was carefully designed to include open-ended questions that prompted participants to reflect on their experiences and perceptions of patriarchal structures within their families. Questions were framed to encourage detailed narratives, while also permitting

spontaneity and exploration of themes not initially anticipated by the researchers. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via secure online platforms, depending on participant preference and geographical constraints, lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed verbatim to facilitate thorough analysis.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report. This iterative process allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the data, ensuring themes developed were deeply grounded in the participants' narratives. Throughout the analysis, the research team engaged in regular discussions to refine themes and interpretations, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.

3 Findings

In the study, a total of 25 participants were recruited to explore the evolution of patriarchal structures in contemporary families through semi-structured interviews. The demographic breakdown of the participants was as follows: 12 identified as female, 11 as male, and 2 preferred not to specify their gender, aiming to capture a wide range of perspectives. Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 58 years, with a median age of 35 years, ensuring a representation across various life stages. The educational background of the participants varied widely, including 7 with a high school diploma, 10 with undergraduate degrees, and 8 with postgraduate qualifications, reflecting a diverse range of educational experiences. In terms of employment status, 15 participants were employed full-time, 5 were part-time workers, and 5 were unemployed at the time of the study, offering insights into how economic factors might influence family dynamics. The participants hailed from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and included a mix of urban (15 participants) and rural (10 participants) residents, allowing the study to explore how location and living conditions impact the perception and implementation of patriarchal structures within families.

Table 1

The Results of Thematic Analysis

Categories (Themes)	Subcategories (Subthemes)	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Changing Dynamics of Authority	1.1 Decision-Making Processes	- Joint decisions- Autonomy in personal matters- Financial authority- Child-rearing decisions
	1.2 Gender Roles in Family	- Breadwinning responsibilities- Domestic chores distribution- Childcare involvement
	1.3 Conflict Resolution	- Communication strategies- Role of elders- External mediation
	1.4 Influence of External Factors	- Societal norms- Economic conditions- Educational attainment
2. Economic Influences on Patriarchy	2.1 Financial Independence	- Employment status- Education level- Access to resources
	2.2 Household Economy Management	- Budgeting roles- Investment decisions- Savings and expenses control
	2.3 Impact of Economic Crises	- Stress on patriarchal structures- Adaptation strategies- Redistribution of roles
3. Cultural and Social Norms	3.1 Perceptions of Masculinity and Femininity	- Strength and dominance- Nurturing and empathy- Appearance and behavior norms
	3.2 Marriage and Family Traditions	- Arranged vs. love marriage- Wedding rituals- Inheritance practices
	3.3 Role of Religion and Tradition	- Religious teachings on family roles- Cultural expectations- Modern vs. traditional practices
	3.4 Education and Awareness	- Gender studies in curriculum- Access to diverse media- Community education programs
	3.5 Influence of Media and Technology	- Social media trends- Online communities- Digital literacy

The qualitative analysis revealed three principal themes that characterize the evolution of patriarchal structures in contemporary families: Changing Dynamics of Authority, Economic Influences on Patriarchy, and Cultural and Social Norms. These themes were dissected into various subthemes, with each exploring a unique facet of the family structure through the lens of patriarchal evolution.

3.1 Changing Dynamics of Authority

The first theme, Changing Dynamics of Authority, encompasses the shift in decision-making processes, gender roles, conflict resolution strategies, and the influence of external factors on family authority structures.

Decision-Making Processes: Participants highlighted a move towards more joint decision-making within families, with one interviewee stating, "Both of us have an equal say in our family's major decisions, from finances to our children's education." This subtheme captures the evolving autonomy individuals experience in personal matters, financial authority, and child-rearing decisions.

Gender Roles in Family: The traditional distribution of roles is undergoing a transformation, as indicated by the shifting breadwinning responsibilities and the distribution of domestic chores. "My husband takes equal part in household chores, and it's no longer seen as just my responsibility," shared a participant, reflecting on the blurring lines of gender-specific roles.

Conflict Resolution: The strategies families employ to resolve conflicts have become more varied, including open communication and seeking external mediation. A respondent mentioned, "We now discuss and try to understand each other's perspectives rather than letting our parents decide for us."

Influence of External Factors: The impact of societal norms, economic conditions, and educational attainment on family authority structures was also noted. "Economic stress has forced us to reconsider our roles within the family," explained a participant, underlining the adaptability of family structures.

3.2 Economic Influences on Patriarchy

Economic Influences on Patriarchy delve into how financial independence, household economy management, and economic crises reshape patriarchal norms.

Financial Independence: The path to financial independence is seen as a key factor in challenging traditional patriarchal structures. "Having my own income has given me a voice in our family that I wouldn't have otherwise," a participant observed, emphasizing the empowerment derived from employment and education.

Household Economy Management: The roles individuals play in budgeting, investment decisions, and controlling expenses are crucial in understanding the economic dynamics within families. "I am now more involved in

managing our investments, something that traditionally was my husband's domain," a respondent noted.

Impact of Economic Crises: Economic downturns have a pronounced impact on family dynamics, necessitating adaptations that often challenge patriarchal norms. "The recent financial crisis made us rethink our family roles and who does what," shared another participant.

3.3 Cultural and Social Norms

The final theme, Cultural and Social Norms, explores how perceptions of masculinity and femininity, marriage and family traditions, the role of religion and tradition, education and awareness, and the influence of media and technology contribute to the evolution of patriarchal structures.

Perceptions of Masculinity and Femininity: The changing societal perceptions around what constitutes masculine and feminine behaviors significantly impact family dynamics. "It's okay for men to be vulnerable," one interviewee remarked, challenging traditional notions of strength and dominance.

Marriage and Family Traditions: The adherence to or departure from traditional marriage and family practices reflect evolving patriarchal structures. "We chose a love marriage over an arranged one, breaking a long family tradition," was a point of pride for one of the participants.

Role of Religion and Tradition: This subtheme captures the balancing act between adhering to religious teachings and cultural expectations while navigating modern family practices. "We try to maintain a balance between our cultural traditions and what we believe is right for our family today," a participant explained.

Education and Awareness: Access to education, particularly gender studies, and diverse media have played a significant role in shifting patriarchal norms. "Learning about gender equality has changed how we approach many aspects of our family life," mentioned a respondent.

Influence of Media and Technology: The pervasive influence of media and technology has introduced new perspectives into traditional family structures. "Social media has opened our eyes to different ways of living and being a family," another participant concluded.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The qualitative analysis of this study identified three main themes that encapsulate the evolution of patriarchal structures within contemporary families: Changing Dynamics of Authority, Economic Influences on Patriarchy,

and Cultural and Social Norms. Each theme is further divided into various categories, with Changing Dynamics of Authority encompassing Decision-Making Processes, Gender Roles in Family, Conflict Resolution, and Influence of External Factors. Economic Influences on Patriarchy are delineated into Financial Independence, Household Economy Management, and Impact of Economic Crises categories. Cultural and Social Norms include Perceptions of Masculinity and Femininity, Marriage and Family Traditions, Role of Religion and Tradition, Education and Awareness, and Influence of Media and Technology.

The Changing Dynamics of Authority theme explored the transition towards more egalitarian structures within families, emphasizing joint decision-making processes, the shifting distribution of domestic responsibilities, and novel approaches to conflict resolution. Participants described a move away from traditional, male-dominated decision-making to a model that values the input of all family members, indicating a broader shift in the dynamics of authority. Categories under this theme highlighted the nuanced ways in which gender roles are being renegotiated, with men taking on more domestic chores and both partners sharing financial and child-rearing responsibilities. Conflict resolution strategies now lean towards communication and understanding, underscoring the influence of societal norms and economic conditions on family decision-making processes.

Economic Influences on Patriarchy shed light on the pivotal role of financial independence in challenging traditional patriarchal norms. This theme captured the nuances of how economic autonomy and the management of household economies contribute to the reshaping of family structures. Financial Independence emerged as a critical category, with participants noting the empowerment and shift in family dynamics that come with economic self-sufficiency. Household Economy Management was discussed in terms of budgeting, investment decisions, and control over expenses, indicating a move towards shared financial responsibilities. The Impact of Economic Crises category revealed how financial hardships prompt families to reassess traditional roles and adapt to new economic realities.

Cultural and Social Norms encompassed the ways in which cultural expectations, education, and media influence perceptions of gender roles and familial responsibilities. This theme highlighted a growing awareness and questioning of traditional gender stereotypes, as seen in the Perceptions of Masculinity and Femininity category, where

changes in societal norms are prompting a reevaluation of what it means to be male or female within the family context. Marriage and Family Traditions reflected the tensions between traditional practices and modern values, particularly in how couples navigate marriage and inheritance. The Role of Religion and Tradition, Education and Awareness, and the Influence of Media and Technology categories underscored the significant impact of external cultural and informational sources in shaping and sometimes challenging patriarchal structures within families.

The emergence of joint decision-making processes within families marks a significant departure from traditional patriarchal authority. Participants described a more egalitarian approach to decisions regarding finances, child-rearing, and everyday family life, reflecting a shift towards shared authority. This evolution mirrors the observations of Hoang and Yeoh (2011), who noted the increasing number of breadwinning wives and the subsequent impact on gender dynamics within the family (Hoang & Yeoh, 2011). Similarly, Hu (2018) highlighted the changing roles within Chinese families, suggesting a broader trend towards renegotiation of traditional gender roles and responsibilities (Hu, 2018).

The economic independence of women emerged as a pivotal factor in challenging and reshaping patriarchal norms within families. Participants' narratives underscored how financial autonomy fosters a sense of empowerment and shifts in traditional power dynamics. This finding aligns with Ahmed's (2020) discussion on the implications of migration for women's roles within Pakistani families, suggesting that economic factors play a crucial role in transforming family structures (Ahmed, 2020). Furthermore, Salem and Yount (2019) provided insights into how workplace gender segregation in Qatar accommodates patriarchal structures, emphasizing the complex interplay between economic activities and patriarchal norms (Salem & Yount, 2019).

The influence of cultural and social norms on the evolution of patriarchal structures was another significant theme. Participants highlighted the impact of education, media, and changing perceptions of masculinity and femininity on family dynamics. This aligns with James-Hawkins and Qutteina's (2016) findings on young Arab women's role conflict in Qatar, where rapid changes in normative gender roles challenge traditional expectations (James-Hawkins & Qutteina, 2016). Additionally, the study's findings resonate with McHale, Crouter, and Whiteman's (2003) work on the family contexts of gender development, underscoring the importance of cultural and

social influences in shaping gender roles within the family (McHale et al., 2003).

The findings from this study underscore a multifaceted evolution of patriarchal structures, driven by a complex interplay of economic, cultural, and social factors. This evolution reflects a broader trend towards more egalitarian family structures, as evidenced by the shift towards joint decision-making, the empowerment derived from economic independence, and the impact of changing cultural norms. The nuanced understanding of patriarchal dynamics offered by this research adds to the body of literature that examines the transformation of gender roles and family structures. For instance, Bereng (2021) explored the manifestations of patriarchal ideology in educational settings, offering parallels to the shifts observed in family dynamics (Bereng, 2021). Similarly, the work of Fincher and Thornhill (2012) on the adaptive aspects of in-group sociality provides an evolutionary perspective that complements the socio-cultural insights gleaned from this study (Fincher & Thornhill, 2012).

Moreover, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which patriarchal norms are both challenged and reinforced. The role of economic pressures, as discussed by Sana and Massey (2005) in the context of migrant remittances, and the impact of cultural shifts, as illustrated by Qi (2014) in the evolution of filial obligation in China, offer corroborative evidence of the complex processes influencing family dynamics (Qi, 2014; Sana & Massey, 2005).

This qualitative study explored the evolution of patriarchal structures within contemporary families through the narratives of 25 participants. The findings revealed three main themes: the changing dynamics of authority, marked by a move towards joint decision-making and the renegotiation of traditional gender roles; the significant role of economic influences, where financial independence emerged as a key factor in challenging patriarchal norms; and the impact of cultural and social norms, which includes the effects of education, media, and changing perceptions of masculinity and femininity on family dynamics.

The investigation into these themes highlights a complex interplay between economic factors, cultural shifts, and evolving gender roles, driving the transformation of patriarchal structures within families. This study contributes to the existing body of literature by providing nuanced insights into how families navigate and negotiate the remnants of patriarchal authority, pointing towards a gradual but evident shift towards more egalitarian family structures.

This study, while illuminating, is not without limitations. The reliance on semi-structured interviews as the sole data collection method, though rich in detail, limits the generalizability of the findings. The sample size, though sufficient for qualitative saturation, may not fully capture the breadth of experiences across different cultures, socio-economic statuses, and family structures. Additionally, the subjective interpretation of qualitative data introduces an inherent bias that could influence the analysis and conclusions drawn from the study.

Future research should aim to address the limitations noted in this study by incorporating a more diverse sample that spans various cultural, socio-economic, and geographical backgrounds. Employing a mixed-methods approach could also enrich the understanding of the evolution of patriarchal structures by combining the depth of qualitative insights with the breadth and generalizability of quantitative data. Additionally, longitudinal studies could offer valuable perspectives on how family dynamics and patriarchal structures evolve over time in response to changing societal norms and economic conditions.

The findings of this study have important implications for practitioners working in family therapy, social work, and educational settings. Professionals should consider the evolving dynamics within families and the impact of economic and cultural shifts on gender roles and authority structures. There is a need for interventions that support families in navigating these changes, promoting communication and understanding among family members. Educational programs that address gender equality and challenge traditional patriarchal norms could further empower individuals to negotiate their roles within the family. This research underscores the importance of acknowledging and adapting to the ongoing evolution of family structures in contemporary society, advocating for practices that support more equitable and harmonious family environments.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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