



**Neoliberalism, Social Crises and the New Middle Classes in Pakistan:
A Case of Internal Migrants from Rural Pakistan to Capital Islamabad***

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Abstract:

The current work concerns a critical analysis of the recent tensions and conflicts related to family, parenting practices, kids' nurturing and regulation of family affairs in the capital city of Pakistan. The current work concerns a critical analysis of the recent tensions and conflicts related to family, parenting practices, kids' nurturing and regulation of family affairs in the capital city of Pakistan. With a qualitative methodological approach, a small purposive sample (n=17) of new middle class families whose' rising income has led to an upward social mobility was interviewed. The interview data was transcribed from the vernacular into English and utilized for analysis with an interpretive approach. The new consolidated middle classes in Pakistan are the product of neoliberal globalization, new economic opportunities in the services sector, agribusinesses and remittances from abroad. Additionally, access to the new social media, online shopping facilities, private schooling, and access to private transportation have given birth to several social tensions and parenting practices. This paper focused to explore some of the social tensions and conflicts that have emerged due to breaking down of the traditional family systems and values, and a turbulent transition towards new urban lifestyle and parenting practices.

Keywords: Pakistan, Islamabad, new middle classes, neoliberalism, social tensions, conflict

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is a transition society. Since partition (i.e., August 14, 1947), the structure of Pakistan's economy and society has undergone a sea change. With the changing structures of economy, several key relationships between individuals, families, clans, tribes, and even the state have also witnessed

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drastic variation. Historian and political economist S. Akbar Zaidi has beautifully summed this discussion stating Pakistan is no more a feudal society because the composition of GDP and the contributing factors to economy have completely changed (Zaidi, 2005). Dr. Zaidi referred to the initial conditions and structure of the economy at the time of partition when the predominant contribution to GDP was coming from agriculture sector, majority of the people were living in rural areas, 99 percent of the exports were based on raw cotton and jute, the industrial and manufacturing base was almost non-existent, and the modern services sector was almost absent.

It is important to mention our epistemological position here. We do not claim or suggest that change and transition is always better and for the good. Our reference to transformation in the economic and social structure in Pakistan does not necessarily mean our appreciation for each and every aspect of change occurred. The transformation and transition have definitely introduced new ways of farming, tractorization, mechanization of agriculture, improvement in manufacturing and industrial activity, rise in per capita incomes, phenomenal growth in exports, universities, and urbanization, and so on and so forth. However, these changes have created a lot of both vertical and horizontal inequalities in society. Even the famous decade of development caused severe inequalities across individuals and regions, which created ethnopolitical tensions and ultimately led to the debacle of Bengal in December 1971.

Another aspect of the same transition has been an impact on breaking down of joint family system and traditional values. The weakening familial bonds and an uncertain transition to modern living have created spaces for violence and conflicts as well. In some cases, the space created by the broken familial bonds is filled by solidarity and friendship networks, associational life and club memberships. Such conditions provide an opportunity for some extremist religious and even ethnopolitical groups to provide alternative solidarity networks to individuals seceded from extended family networks. Both contribute to social tensions and ultimately to violence and conflict.

How do we approach the family and other traditional units of relationships for the progress and development of an individual? It is to be mentioned here that we do not necessarily consider centralized close-knit family structures conducive for the growth of individual and his/her personality. The impact of a changing economic structures on family structures may be useful and required in some cases. A healthy, educated, informed and politically aware individual, we argue, is the backbone of a prosperous society. It is the individual that forms a healthy family, community, and thus society. It is a liberal-progressive position which is employed in this research study.

Historically, the country has inherited a “traditional” approach, which is a joint and extended family structure. The individuals are supposed to be the building blocks of an extended family structure, which is consisting of grandparents, parents, siblings, husband and wife, and in some cases uncles and cousins. A degree of variation across the country can be found about the scale and scope of a joint family. As mentioned above, the socio-economic structure has drastically changed since Pakistan came into being and it has deeply impacted the approaches to family structure as well. We do not have an empirical evidence about the exact and precise impact of the economic restructuring on family and extended family system in Pakistan. As evident from several indicators, such as composition of GDP, labor force, urbanization, literacy, gender and income distribution. Pakistani society has witnessed several key transformations (Zaidi, 2005). For example, some of major

changes are the rapidly growing urbanization, which is one of the highest in South Asia (Domínguez, 2014) and the consolidation of new middle classes (Siddiqi, n.d.). There is considerable growth from rural to urban migration. There is a huge Pakistani migrant community in the Middle East, EU, North America and UK, which is impacting the society in multifarious ways.

The structure of the paper is given as follows. The introduction section is followed by a discussion about some theoretical perspectives. Methodology of the paper, research setting, and data collection issues are mentioned in the next section. The section before conclusion is based on key findings and analysis.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Family in society has always remained a tool of control and a key subject of discussion in sociology and other social sciences disciplines. The functionalists consider family as the key channel of socialization. For the Marxists and neo-Marxists, family is more harmful than beneficial for an individual: “the family transmits the dominant bourgeois culture of capitalist society, preventing people from seeing the world as it really is” (Wilson, 2001). Thus the family, for the Marxists, is an institution and tool that “weakens the workers’ determination to stand and fight capitalism” (ibid). The family’s role is that of a consolation to the proletariat, which intoxicates the labour class and thus plays a role in relaxing them from the injustices inflicted upon them by the upper class. Thus, in addition to religion, family is also an integral part of the ideological state apparatus. One key criticism emerged concerns the impact of a strong family and an interdependent culture on the individual and his productive self. An over organized society and dependent culture discourages individual’s growth and creativity (Barber, 2002; Nelson, 2012); Segrin et al. 2013; Schiffrin et al. 2015). In a struggle to come up with an alternative to the institution of family, several suggestions emerged. Some suggested “collective” and others came up with the idea of “communes” (Kanter, Jaffe and Weisberg, 1975). The idea is to keep the nuclear family intact and only resources should be shared by the communes. (Elliot, 1986). Despite all these efforts, the role of parenting cannot be discarded and the role it plays in the evolution of an individual self can hardly be overemphasized. Massive academic studies can be found on the role of family, siblings, parents, grandparents, extended family, and a nuclear family on the personality development of a child. The subject has been thoroughly investigated with psychological and sociological approaches.

The Neoliberal Globalization and the its Impact

Neoliberalism here is understood in the light of the Washington Consensus, as coined and popularized by John Williamson in his various studies (Williamson, 1991). Neoliberalism, according to this consensus, offers a list of policy prescriptions including among others, import liberalization, privatization, deregulation and openness to foreign trade (Williamson, 2004). The underlying assumptions that less regulation and more openness guarantees economic efficiency, growth and distributional justice are a contentious subject, and beyond the scope of this paper.

As widely discussed in academic literature, the neoliberalism is not just an economic policy prescription but also a very comprehensive sociopolitical and cultural agenda which aims to re-order and re-program both culture and society. This discussion can be summarily seen in an interview with the Sunday Times in May 1981, Margerat Thatcher: “...it isn’t that I set out on economic policies; it’s that I set out really to change the approach, and changing the economics is

the means of changing that approach. If you change the approach you really are after the heart and soul of the nation. Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul.”

Based on an approach to de-regulate economy, strengthen market, abolish subsidies and preferential treatment for priority sectors, neo-liberalism strives to reform capitalism. In this struggle, economics and market emerge as the sole standards of measurement and appreciation in society. This approach ultimately leads to marketization of economy, politics and society with an economic approach: “that human life should be primarily governed by economics, with human lives becoming subordinate to “capital”. As this philosophy advanced, mothers of the early 21st century became routinely expected to pay professionals to care for very young children whilst they engaged in paid labour.”

A review of literature on neoliberalism shows that at least three aspects of neoliberalism are discernible: 1) a ‘proto’ neoliberalism (Hayek and Friedman’s intellectual project, the alternative to a Keynesian welfare state); 2) a ‘roll-back’ neoliberalism (the discreditation or even active destruction of Keynesian-welfarist and social collectivist institutions) and, 3) the ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism (the construction and consolidation of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations in order to stabilize neoliberalism) as suggested by Ball, 2015.

Our focus in this paper is to explore some of the social tensions and conflicts that have emerged due to breaking down of the traditional family systems and values, and a turbulent transition towards new urban lifestyle and parenting practices, which are a product of the neoliberal globalization. Seceding from traditional family structures, rural connections, familial ties, and extended networks of clans, the new urban families are adopting new ways of parenting and parenting practices to nurture their kids. The new political economy in the urban areas have created new opportunity spaces for a variety of businesses that supplement the parents in educating and grooming their kids. For instance, private tutoring and art of parenting are some of the new avenues of engagement in this sector. Some researchers have discussed several “broad-scale shifts – including the emergence of the New Economy, the rolling out of the neoliberal state and the professionalization of parenting that are reconfiguring the landscape of the present day society in which mothers make decisions about how to secure a living and care for their children” (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2016). Likewise, others such as Napolitano et al (2014) have analyzed the effects of the neoliberalisation on the parental expectations in the US (Napolitano et al., 2014). The parenting practices adopted by the new middle classes in Pakistan’s capital city suggest that their approaches and practices are almost in line with the such struggles as discussed by Gillies (2005). According to Gillies, “those parents who fail to inculcate success within their children are not victims of social structural inequalities but are failures in self-governance, unable or unwilling to appropriately capitalize on their lives” (Gillis, 2005; quoted in Amin et al., 2020).

Neoliberalism, New Opportunity Spaces and Social Tensions in Pakistan

Modern ways of parenting, technologies and practices of parenting in urban Pakistan did not receive much academic focus. Mostly researchers have documented their personal stories, biographical accounts, and journalistic discussions. ‘Whereas, such accounts provide access to rich personal insights and underlying panics surrounding the perceived crisis of family and parenting, still these lack academic rigour’ (Amin et al., 2020). A lot of socioeconomic data yet to be

documented and analyzed which has come about to several social changes and economic transformation in society. Jamal's work (2015), for example, is important because it deals with men's role in gender justice and girls' education. Likewise, Sheikh (2009) pays attention to kids' nurturing in a joint or extended family context where the family elders set the basic guidelines. Family planning, family laws, and religious aspects of child rights and family's importance, and cousin marriages (Ullah, 2018), however, have received some attention. 'The changing dynamics of society due to re-programming of socio-economic relations such as neoliberalism are hardly the subject of critical research' (Amin et al., 2020). There is an increasing over health hazards in the context of cousin marriages. The main reasons quoted in support of cousin marriages were "clan solidarity, marital stability and familiarity with prospective partners in a strictly sex-segregated society" (Qadeer, 2006). There are some unstated reasons in conducting cousin marriages that relate to keeping property and wealth from further distribution (between law and custom). In some areas of Balochistan and Sindh, it has been noted that if women's marriages are not arranged in family they are forced to marry the Holy Book/Quran to keep the property in family (Wattoo, 2014).

In addition to above-mentioned, honor killing, women's visibility in public places, wage differentials in work place, harassment related issues and concerns and arranged marriages are hot subjects of debate in Pakistan. These issues could be taken up due to various structural transformations in society and economy including urbanization, literacy, social media and an emerging new public sphere. The neoliberalization has also given space to new interpreters of Islam to project their reformist ideas in society which are liberating and empowering for society and the parents living in the urban space. For instance, Ghamidi and his interpretive community have gained salience in the last two decades due to the introduction of new media and their reformist ideas have made inroads in society. As highlighted by Amin (2022) in his research, Ghamidi's liberating ideas help addressing some of the tensions and conflicts emerged due to conservative religious interpretations.

Regarding women and gender concerns, the social tensions created by the new opportunity spaces have the following broad features: (a) an increasing concern, public debate and political discourse on equal opportunities for women in the realm of market, politics and education; (b) women activists and social groups are becoming more proactive and vocal in the public discourse. Both social media and the mainstream media highlight their issues and concerns; (c) women visibility in public places has increased and the new university boom in the recent past has provided spaces for their social interaction; (d) with increasing awareness, rising literacy and reformist ideas, women are increasingly questioning traditional values and becoming more expressive in their choices (from dress selection to career choices to choosing their life partners); (e) arranged marriages are debated, and in some cases publicly criticized and there seems an increase in divorce rate.

Traditional versus Contemporary Pakistani Family & Parenting in the Neoliberal Era

In the last four decades, a neoliberal logic and process has taken lead in Pakistan which have been seeking policies of liberalization, openness, and privatization. (Zaidi, 2009). These processes have created spaces in the realm of market, media and politics. Due to the inflow of resources from multiple sources (aid, war-time assistance, remittances, etc.) during the '80s, '90s and then after 9/11, the rise and the subsequent consolidation of a sizable middle class in Pakistani society has

occurred (Amin, 2010; Durr-e-Nayab, 2005). The rise of new middle classes in the recent past has remained a contested issue because everyone does not agree with this bold assertion. Nayab, in her study conducted in 2005, indicated the emergence of a middle income population segment which can be termed a middle class in terms of consumption. As mentioned earlier, the sources of middle class income are multiple. Afshan Subohi in news article mentions Global Wealth Report 2015, Credit Suisse said that Pakistan has 18th largest middle class in the world (Subohi, 2015).

In Pakistan, a simultaneous rise in influence of mass culture and material modernization has been observed. TV news channels, music stations and rapid cable and satellite etc. are penetrating in the society and are accessible to the urbanized elites as well as the people in rural areas. Pakistan has over 7.5 million internet users and ranks 9th in the world in the number of cell phones (The World Factbook, 2010). Social media has made it easy for the Pakistani diaspora living abroad to stay connected with their families and communities in their homelands. These transnational networks and connections are playing significant role in changing the societal perspectives in Pakistan (Jamal, 2018). The spending habit of the middle-class households are transforming rapidly as they have greater aspirations to enhance their social status so they enter modern malls, traditional bazaars and switch to online shopping (Subohi, 2015). Popular Bollywood films idealizing visions of love and romance pose a challenge to the culture and tradition and are perceived to exert an “influence over how marriage and love are being dened, especially among the young.” Instable social consensus concerning values and norms has given way to “contradictory mores and institutional lags” (Qadeer, 2012).

Mentioned in Amin et al (2020), the data show that in Pakistan, 13,299 Khula (in Islamic law it is a form of divorce initiated by the wife) cases were reported only in the Punjab Province in 2012. In 2013 it rose to 14, 243, and in 2014 the Khula cases were 16, 942. In 2016 alone, 18, 901 cases were reported. It shows that the divorce rate is on the rise in Pakistan. Some of the reasons outlined included unnecessary interference of relatives such as siblings, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, parents-in-law etc. in married life and economic, emotional awareness in women. Zaman et.al (2018) believed that globalization has encouraged women to seek divorce more confidently. Whereas most Muslim societies are undergoing this process of socio-economic changes (Nasr, 2009) the case of Pakistan exemplifies typical case of “simultaneous processes in multiple directions that include both modernization and Islamization (Qadeer, 2006).”

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in nature and utilizes information generated from a small sample (n=17) of respondents living in the capital city of Islamabad. This research further solidifies and augments our previous study (Amin et al., 2020) on a similar subject. The purposive sample selected for semi-structured interviews consisted of parents (both male and female) belonging to modern professional cadres in the urban space. All of the respondents migrated from rural areas of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. We borrowed Baumrind’s classification (1967; 1987) including an authoritarian style (which is too rigid, hard and strict), a permissive one (which is too soft and often result into spoiling kids), and an authoritative style (in which the parents present themselves as authority figures expecting their children to behave) (Baumrind, 1967). The in-depth interviews were conducted face to face for 40 to 60 minutes. All interviews were tape recorded, transcribed from the vernacular into English. The semi-structured interviews

were guided by the following guiding questions:

1. In what ways, the new economic opportunities and increase in income have contributed to a change in their parenting styles?
2. Has the torture and corporal punishment completely abandoned by the parents in the sample? If yes, how they regulate their kids' lives and preferences?

In line with our previous analysis and findings (Amin et al., 2020), the respondents in the sample experiences visible improvement in their economic gains, which further contributed to their upward social mobility. A visible shift in their lifestyle and consumption occurred due to rise in income and change in social networks. The change in lifestyle included their access to elite schooling for their kids, private tutoring and paid coaching (Jarvis, 2017). Considering investing in kids' improved education, the parents adopted several modern ways of regulating and surveilling their kids.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Almost all respondents indicated that significant improvement in their incomes has occurred due to various reasons in the last ten to twenty years. Specifically, in the post 2000 era, new avenues of income generation were reported by all respondents. Most of them belonging to modern professions in the services sector reported overwhelming increase in their salaries and wages which led to expanded opportunities for them. They talked about visible improvement in their standard of living including housing, consumption, schooling, transportation, and health services.

Reflecting on social capital that they had in their native towns before migrating to Islamabad, almost all admitted that they have lost that capital which was accumulated by their forefathers over several decades; however, sixty-seven percent of the respondents claimed that they have built new social networks/filial networks as alternative to their familial bonds in their previous hometowns. Initially, they kept on residing with a feeling of strangeness in Islamabad, but with passing time, their friendship and business networks developed and thus the bond with siblings and cousins staying back in native towns weakened. This finding is in line with our previous research but we noticed an increase in the social networks of the respondents in the capital city. Another reason for getting accustomed to the capital city may be other migrating siblings and cousins, and other blood relatives which further strengthened their social capital.

One of the key impacts of relying on market forces and using a neoliberal logic relates to weakening social ties with blood relatives. Using a cost-benefit analysis in inter-personal relations creates a sense of economic rationality but may lead to a loss of friends, relatives, and solidarity with community, which may not be as measureable as the material losses and gains; yet, loss of social networks exposes one to vulnerabilities and key risks. For instance, one such negative impact may be easy access to petty interest-free loans from affluent and resourceful relatives and friends. The tremendous growth in rate of divorce and late marriages (Sarthar, 1998) may be some of the other outcomes of this economistic thinking.

Significant majority (93 percent) of the respondents reported that their own parenting styles has undergone a sea change from that of their parents and even some could recall their grandparents. As mentioned previously as well (Amin et al., 2020), parenting changes from a permissive and authoritative one. One of the key impacts reported in their lives concerned a sharp decline in

corporal punishment of their kids. They also reported the same decline in their close friends' circles. Parenting thus emerged too caring for their kids to the level of spoiling kids. One such parent mentioned:

We're very lenient and loving to our kids. Our parents weren't like that. They were very harsh and would recourse to physical torture over petty issues. It's perhaps my own bitter experience with that parenting style that I'm consciously avoiding use of corporal punishment. However, sometimes I closely observe that perhaps due to my extreme caring attitude, my kids have turned disobedient as well. They argue with me and this sometimes infuriates us and create a lot of tension and conflict within my household.

Some of the respondents in the sample were in the teaching profession and they blamed the urban parents for the mal-conduct, disobedience, and behavioral issues of the students. In their view, old style parenting was better than the current one which instilled good moral behavior and obedience among the kids. Some respondents emphasized on the missing moral education (tarbiyyah) both in homes and in schools.

One of the business opportunity space opened up by the neoliberal approach is private tutoring, mentoring, therapy centers, and counseling. In this way, several profit-driven enterprises join the biological parents in the parenting practices and design courses and programs to transform individuals into desirable ones compatible with market. The new middle-income strata in the sample aspire to key power and business positions for their kids and thus invest in the expensive schooling and career planning of their children. A mother having two kids expressed her aspiration in the following words:

The main motivation behind moving to Islamabad from our native town was to get access to quality education for our kids. No such opportunities were available in Balochistan and I invest heavily in my kids' future education. I wish basic schooling was not a sellable commodity and was available to everyone.

The same concern was mentioned by several respondents, which reveal the fact that quality education is a missing facility in the rural areas, and schooling is commodified. One can also easily reflect over the causes of rapid urbanization which has several negative consequences for the environment. Availability of quality social services at hometowns might discourage this pattern.

Despite having stable source of income, most respondents remained nostalgic of their past as a part of an extended community. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they plan to spend their post-retirement times in the native towns. Urban life, for some, was full of miseries and boredom. Having a sense of meaninglessness in life, some argued, urban living is a curse. For them, it created more material ambitions than they used to have which created a lot of stress and anxiety. One such stressed middle class family commented in the following words:

Honestly, despite having access to all facilities, life has become a boring experience for us. Things and commodities have replaced people and relations, and we are almost disenchanted with this. The more we earn, the more we feel deprived and resourceless. We feel something deep inside us is missing and calling for satisfaction. I contacted psychiatrists, therapists and healers to diagnose my problem but none of them could explain to me the real essence of my problems. I have lost inner happiness and self-fulfillment and material things just satisfy my material needs.

The concern revealed by the abovementioned family may be the concern of many urban dwellers. The cause of concern may both be real and greed-driven, or psychological and lack of spiritual happiness. This issue needs a lot of scientific and empirical evidence beyond the scope of this paper. However, what we have observed during our fieldwork relates to modern consumerism and reliance on market and commercialism. The competition in academic and material success, as reported by the respondents and what we inferred from the filed data, has exceeded limits and entered into a zone of rivalry and unhealthy exercise.

The sample interviewed for this paper revealed that violence through corporal punishment has almost ceased to exist in their parenting style. The question still arises whether such an absence of torture may be interpreted as the absence of violence at all? Or have the technologies of violence of the migrant parents (new middle classes in the urban space) changed from old ways of punishing their kids to new ways of violence which is more psychological in nature. The later mainly refers to more enlightened ways of surveillance and control which is supplemented by various paid services (coaching, tutoring, mentoring etc). Studies focusing on these stated aspects of psychological violence and technologies of control and surveillance are deficient and a visible gap in the literature can be filled by carrying out research. More systematic studies are required to investigate practices such as keeping kids in isolation, withdrawal of freedom and privileges, privation and time-out.

Amin et al (2020) have cited Foucault about the authority of parents (and specifically father) over their kids is one of their essential patriarchal rights. Likewise, Taylor refers to Foucault's description of parental powers over kids: "Parents may monitor their children, they may keep them prisoners in their homes, they may discipline them to brush their teeth and keep them on a strict timetable..." Put this in contrast to our neoliberal times as trilateral alliance of intellectual project, political discourse and policy prescriptions, apparently are assumed to be loosening the grip of "authorities" and thus having liberating effects for individuals. However, looking at the familial relations in the context of neoliberalism (as complex web of disciplinary knowledge production and practices in the realm of culture, economy, politics and society), it is revealed that the "sovereign authority" of parents is supplemented by disciplinary practices as well. And thus "the sovereign power of the family continues to play a crucial collaborative role within a disciplinary society." According to Foucault,

Until the middle of the eighteenth century the aristocratic or bourgeois family . . . was above all a sort of relational system. It was a bundle of relations of ancestry, descent, collateral relations, cousinhood, primogeniture, and alliances corresponding to schemas for the transmission of kinship and the division of goods and social status. Sexual prohibitions effectively focused on these kinds of relations." In contrast to this traditional family, we now have the modern family, or the biopolitical family cell: What is now being constituted is a sort of restricted, close-knit, substantial, compact, corporeal, and affective family core: the cell family in place of the relational family; the cell family with its corporeal, affective, and sexual space entirely saturated by direct parent-child relationships.

One common trend noted in the global academic literature is the schoolification and datafication of early childhood among the newly rich segments of society. Pakistan is no exception to that trend, and the same has been observed in our study. Guy Roberts-Holmes (2014) shows that extreme emphasis placed on literacy and numeracy, rather than broader foundations that are the real requirements of the children results into the datafication and schoolification of early years. In a

struggle to equip their children with more vocabulary and numeracy, parents leave relatively no room for the overall growth and development of the personality of their children.

Isha Fahad (2016) critically examined the prevailing mix of “care” and “competition” and the blind race for obtaining good grades among Pakistani parents. Within this selfishly competitive pursuit, parents in Pakistan have burdened the innocent minds of their kids with modern gadgets and iPads. By doing so, thus, parents feel relinquished from the heavy and serious responsibility of parenting and mentoring. The result of this parenting style is this heavy reliance on private tutoring, rote learning, and taking short cuts in early childhood.

One of the most contested and critically assessed dimensions of neoliberalism is its programming of life and society on a business model. This conception encompasses all avenues of life. Neoliberalism thus turns out to be a project aiming at totalitarian/comprehensive programming of life bringing all aspects of life under its ambit. The downside of this project is that, as argued by Titus Alexander, “neoliberal societies uncritically base their education systems upon a business model, seeing education as the programming of learners as quickly as possible, through a mechanical ‘transmit and test’ approach – yet again the dominance of the economy over humanity.”

CONCLUSION

Like other societies of the world, Pakistan too experienced the emergence and proliferation of a neoliberal era in the last four decades. As discussed in this paper, the neoliberal order impacts political discourses, states’ legislation, socioeconomic policies, and social preferences. Based on an economic approach to state and society, the neoliberal logic purports a specific ideology, discourse, and policy prescription that impacts family, parenting and upbringing practices of the kids. The consolidated new middle classes in Pakistan, as we analyzed the data generated from the interviews from a small sample in Islamabad, are also passing through a great transition and transformation. Nostalgic about the past and an strong perception of the lived golden past in rural areas, the migrant families are in a constant struggle to adjust to new conditions in the urban space. Not everything was so great, as the interviews data reveal, in the rural setting including several controls by the parents, elders and grandfathers. Most of the practices ended up in crushing the individual’s self-respect, autonomy, and creative potential. However, complete detachment from the larger family structures also caused several tensions and issues of loneliness and anxieties. A new approach premised on a third way, a moderation, and a balanced view may be recommended.

- Note: The original draft of this paper was presented by the principal author (Husnul Amin) in the International Conference funded and organized by the Sociological Association, Turkey, held in the Istanbul University in March 2018. A draft of the same paper was further refined by the Principal Author (Husnul Amin) with Aamir Jamal and Swati Dhingra intended for publication in Sage Open. The Preprint of that version is available online. However, it was not accepted by the Sage Open for publication. The current paper builds on the original study presented in Turkey by Husnul Amin with a new approach and sample size. The interview data updated and compiled by the co-authors.

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