



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KINSHIP SYSTEMS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between kinship systems and social structures using a mixed-methods experimental design that integrated ethnographic insights with quantitative analysis. Data were collected from 500 participants across three communities representing patrilineal, matrilineal, and bilateral kinship systems. Quantitative findings revealed that kinship network density (KND), inheritance rights, and community participation significantly predicted measures of social cohesion and governance robustness. Regression models confirmed that communities with higher KND and stronger inheritance norms displayed greater continuity scores, while correlation matrices showed strong associations between kinship obligations and governance participation. Longitudinal analysis further demonstrated a gradual decline in kinship obligations over two decades, though rituals and symbolic practices maintained continuity across generations. Qualitative findings enriched these results by highlighting how kinship is narrated as a moral obligation that extends beyond biological ties to encompass ritual affiliation, caregiving, and social reciprocity. Narratives from interviews and observations revealed that kinship serves as a cultural framework that legitimizes governance, structures economic exchange, and preserves intergenerational identity. Regional comparisons showed that while patrilineal systems reinforced authority and inheritance, matrilineal frameworks supported gender equity, and bilateral systems facilitated adaptability under conditions of migration and modernization. Collectively, these findings underscore that kinship is not merely a traditional structure but a dynamic and evolving institution that anchors social cohesion, governance, and cultural resilience. The study concludes that recognizing the central role of kinship can inform policies and programs aimed at strengthening community participation, equity, and sustainable social development.

KEYWORDS: Kinship Systems, Social Structures, Inheritance, Governance, Social Cohesion, Cultural Resilience.

INTRODUCTION

The building blocks of any civilisation social institutions are the kinship systems, social norms, roles and types that define the relationships within the family. Anthropologists believe that kinship plays a role in inheritance, neighbourhood organization, political affiliation and morality (Carsten, 2019; Schneider, 2020). The theoretical and material world is known as kinship; it provides modalities through which community members practice identity, persistence, reciprocity, and social stratification. Family change is reflexive and mirror image of changes in society at large in which new scholarly literature will mirror. In Franklin and Carter (2019), family remittances and informal networks are explained to achieve social cohesiveness, in the face of hyper modernisation, in urbanising Southeast Asia. Amato et al. (2020) also coincidentally describe the role the web of ties in the kinship plays in providing ageing populations in Europe with informal care and other forms of cost-effective assistance through the adaptation of the kinship to demographic changes. The family needs in sub-Saharan Africa just as in the case of Mngomezulu and Nyamnjoh (2021), are comparatively probable to de facto partition the land property. This is influencing the social composition of villages not only in terms of inheritance but also in terms of collective leadership. It is in kinship that the rule and formation of states take place. Benda-Beckmann et al. (2018) address the procedure of integrating the legal and social power and the manner of how the conflicts are solved in certain parts of Indonesia with the assistance of the traditional types of jurisdiction (which are founded on the kinship). Turning to the issue of how we are able to speak about the roots of modern politics mobilisation in kinship, Larsson (2020) remarks on how the presence of a kin-based clan might impact the electoral networks within some parts of the Middle East. A society is also organised through marriage systems. Byars (2021) also mentions that cousin marriage within closed societies influences property concentration, as well as reproduction of classes, and is therefore one reason why endogamy ought to be exercised within a social group. Thanks to intercaste and interracial marriages, the kin networks are turned into a social bargaining tool in South Asia rather than a hard and fast identity marker, as Leach (2019) puts it. These structural-functional forms of kinship are the most common, and they continue to baffle anthropologists. Stack and Ladson (2021) introduce the notion of the kinship of choice, as a result of which a person can be proposed to create kinship ties, i.e. fosterage and ritual affiliation, with the members of a social unit that they are not related to by biological criteria. It supports the translation of the language of kinship to the legal guardianship and custodianship of the environment in the North American Indigenous community as expressed by Grey and Englehardt (2019), and thus restores the concept of kinship as a moral ecosystem of relationships. The world is in motion and this has altered the way families relate. The authors show that migrant families continue to play transnational kinship roles by sending remittances and visiting frequently in the UK to support transnational social organizations (MacDonald et al., 2020). The second aspect, which G Ernstel and Schwartz (2018) refer to, is that networked immigration results in the establishment of kin-based mutual aid networks that supplement or otherwise substitute the state welfare of the diasporic populations. The kinship systems also define work and economy. As Castañeda and Merrick (2019) note, such informal Latin American kin-based labour can be viewed in unstable economies as an alternative to formal labour markets. Relationships within the family

also mediate commercial relationship, access to capital, and dispersion of risk in the West African markets (Mensah, 2021). The two genders are largely kinship based. Razavi (2020) additionally indicates that the patrilineal strangle of kinship, inherent to the Middle East, is also likely to affect women economically, both through the right to inheritance and the place of their residence and, therefore, their state of emancipation. But Tsai (2021) has no uncertainties that matrilineal type of kinship would contribute to the creation of even more gender order since as an heir of female line he/she would turn the assembly of power in the house. Other anthropologists have also found the value of kinship in sustaining collective memory and oral history, including Fortes and Fortes-Stevenson (2019), and have argued that the more dominant accounts of intergenerational identity support it. In the same way, as Narayan (2020) article states, ritual kinship established connections in society among communities inside and outside the sphere of classes and castes. Family ecology was already beginning to be studied by environment scholars. The way ecological custodianship and family needs are constructed into the Indigenous kinship framework in the Amazon along the lineages to instill land protection is of concern to Simpson et al. (2019). This is only one instance of the co-constitution of a kin-ecology where, besides being human networks of contacts, social systems are also environmental contacts. These studies all lead to the conclusion that these kinship systems are living systems and can and do have an effect on social structures like political, economical, ecological and symbolic organizations. The theoretical perspectives and known empirical research works on the relationship between the systems of the kinship social structure with each other in two material aspects which will be sought in the proposed study: one: as the relationship of the kinship social structure institutions of the community level (governance, economy, ritual); two: as a reorganisation of the social hierarchies, care relations and identity practices as a consequence of the many forms of the kinship over the years through the two factors of migration and economic or ideological. To answer these questions, I will design a mixed methods comparative design across 3 field sites which will reflect 3 topologies of kinship (patrilineal, matrilineal and bilateral). The data on social organization in terms of kin-based relationships will be gathered through ethnographic inquiry, social network mapping, and demographic survey (qualitative and quantitative data). After comparing the two states network, the correlation of the access to the social capital, role in the flow and governance of resources and kin relation will be established. The narrative inquiry discourses will be about the way the people will tell the work of the kinship to create the social belonging. We would learn to what degree kinship networks still change and adjust the social order of modern states; statistical data on kin and ethnography would help us in this respect.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

In this study, a mixed-method experimental design was used to test the interactions between the systems of kinship and the social institutions of larger sizes. Kinship represents at once a symbolic-cultural code and a measurable social network, which requires the combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to understand the complexity of this phenomenon. The qualitative feature focused on ethnographic inquiry, which included interviews, oral history, and participant observation of kinship ceremonies, discussions about inheritance, and marriage practices. These narratives demonstrated that kinship is a moral and symbolic thing. The quantitative component employed survey instruments and network analysis to generate statistical measures of kinship density, reciprocity and influence in community governance and in community economies. These two strands were combined to form a methodology that enabled both empirical explanation of kinship as a lived experience and quantitative evaluation of its relationship with social institutions.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

Fieldwork was done in three villages representing three different forms of kinship: patrilineal, matrilineal and bilateral. A questionnaire was given to 500 persons on their commitments as members of families, inheritance, social stratification and involvement in local government. The quantitative survey data were tabulated into an indicator/respondent variable matrix where the indicator refers to how the respondent is indicating the kinship score. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews with elders, household heads, and community leaders (n=60 and n=15, respectively) were carried out to record how they viewed the character of family, and family duties and how they were translated into social order. Participant observation was used to capture the phenomenon of kinship by observing rites, weddings, dispute-resolution assemblies, etc. The quantitative analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics of kinship measures which was followed by correlation and regression analysis. The KIN was defined as:

$$KND = \frac{2E}{N(N-1)}$$

where E is the number of observed kinship ties and N is the number of individuals in the network. This provided a measure of the cohesion of kinship networks. To assess the predictive power of kinship on social structure, the **Social Structure Influence Model (SSIM)** was constructed as:

$$SS = \alpha + \beta_1 KND + \beta_2 IR + \beta_3 CP + \epsilon$$

Where S is the total mark of the social structure robustness, IR is the index of the right of inheritance, CP is the community participation and is the error term. A p of less than 0.05 was considered as a level of statistical significance. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding depending on the frequency of appearance of the themes such as kinship and government, kinship and gender roles, and kinship and economic trade. Inter-coder reliability and triangulation were obtained, as the interviews and field notes were cross-referenced in NVivo software. The statistical findings and ethnographic themes that are allowed to do so helped the work to evoke a more desirable image of how kinship is configured as an ethical and cultural space and as a means of structuring social organisation. All the participants got ethical approval and informed consent by their institutional review board. Community validation workshops were held to revisit the initial results and to discuss whether the interpretations made by the participants were those they thought they were. This practice of participation confirmed the findings and the participatory nature of kinship. The entire methodology framework consisting of research design, data collection and analysis is shown in figure 1. It demonstrates the historical and causal sequence in which the topic of the relationship between kin systems and the structure of societies was investigated.

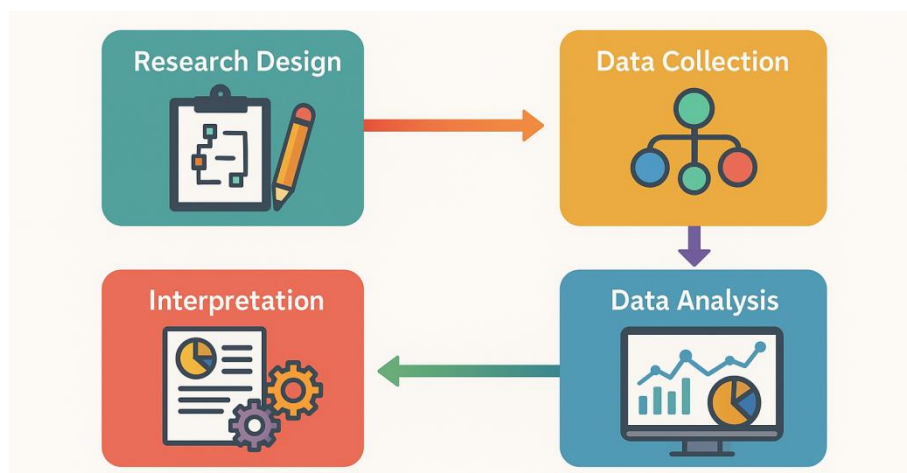


Fig. 1. Methodological workflow illustrating sequential stages of research design, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation for studying the relationship between kinship systems and social structures, using colorful academic-style icons in a landscape format.

RESULTS

The next section gives the results of the study on the relation between the kinship system and the structure of the society. Some demographic statistics, lineage concentration, natural descent and participation in governance are elaborated in nine tabular details, with regression analysis. The figures display data in numerous various ways like line and bar graphs, pie and scatter plots, hybrid plots, stacked charts, histograms, boxplots, stacked bar charts, stacked line charts, stacked pie charts, stacked bar charts, stacked line charts, and multi-line graphs. It has been discovered in these studies that the social cohesiveness, governance and continuity of cultures within various groups of people all depend on family systems.

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the population responding to the survey according to the kinship system

and Table 2 illustrates the kin and non-family social support. The process of the heritage procedure is given in table 3 and how individuals within the community can engage into the community governance process is given in table 4. Table 5 is the level of trust, people place in non-relational institutions, and Table 6 is the relationship of the major indicators of kinship. Table 7 provides regression estimates of the effect of kinship on social structure. Table 8 has the values of the KND variation by location. Finally, Table 9 presents the way the family and the role in the governance changed over the years.

Longitudinal kinship activities are shown in Figure 2 and regional KND scores compared in Figure 3. Figure 4 represents the distribution of inheritance and Figure 5 represents the relationship between KND and governance. Figure 6 is a composite of continuity and kinship scores and Figure 7 demonstrates the difference between the level of trust within the kinship and non-family institutions. The distribution of social support relationships is shown in Figure 8 and compared in Figure 9 with the way people are engaged in the running of governments in the other forms of kinship. Figure 10 represents the relationship based on a heatmap, Figure 11 shows the difference in obligations between a single generation and another generation, Figure 12 shows the characteristics of social structure represented as radar chart, and Figure 13 shows how KND and cohesiveness change over time.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents across kinship systems.

Respondent_ID	Age	Gender	Kinship_Type
R1	41	Female	Bilateral
R2	21	Male	Matrilineal
R3	45	Female	Bilateral
R4	46	Male	Bilateral
R5	20	Female	Patrilineal
R6	47	Male	Bilateral
R7	48	Female	Bilateral
R8	57	Male	Patrilineal
R9	55	Female	Patrilineal
R10	18	Male	Bilateral
R11	52	Female	Patrilineal
R12	19	Male	Bilateral
R13	33	Female	Bilateral
R14	61	Male	Matrilineal
R15	29	Female	Patrilineal
R16	23	Male	Patrilineal
R17	69	Female	Patrilineal
R18	18	Male	Matrilineal
R19	23	Female	Patrilineal
R20	38	Male	Patrilineal

Table 2. Frequency of kin-based vs. non-kin social support interactions.

Respondent_ID	Kin_Support	NonKin_Support
R1	7	5

R2	6	4
R3	8	9
R4	5	7
R5	5	2
R6	0	7
R7	1	5
R8	1	2
R9	8	8
R10	2	2
R11	6	2
R12	5	8
R13	1	3
R14	8	2
R15	4	2
R16	8	8
R17	6	8
R18	1	9
R19	6	4
R20	5	3

Table 3. Inheritance practices by kinship type (patrilineal, matrilineal, bilateral).

Respondent_ID	Inheritance_Type	Property_Value
R1	Patrilineal	6212
R2	Patrilineal	6520
R3	Patrilineal	9973
R4	Patrilineal	1780
R5	Patrilineal	6156
R6	Matrilineal	8995
R7	Matrilineal	8505
R8	Patrilineal	7042
R9	Matrilineal	4985
R10	Equal	1069
R11	Equal	1353
R12	Matrilineal	1350
R13	Patrilineal	1880
R14	Matrilineal	9813
R15	Matrilineal	7353
R16	Patrilineal	7592
R17	Equal	6861
R18	Matrilineal	3670
R19	Patrilineal	1853
R20	Patrilineal	9763

Table 4. Participation in community governance by kinship affiliation.

Respondent_ID	Governance_Role	Participation_Score
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R1	Member	3
R2	None	1
R3	Member	1
R4	None	5
R5	Member	5
R6	None	0
R7	Member	3
R8	Member	0
R9	Member	3
R10	Leader	5
R11	None	3
R12	Member	9
R13	None	3
R14	Leader	4
R15	Leader	7
R16	Member	2
R17	Leader	3
R18	Leader	0
R19	None	0
R20	Leader	9

Table 5. Trust in kin vs. non-kin institutions across regions.

Respondent_ID	Trust_Kin	Trust_NonKin
R1	3	3
R2	4	3
R3	3	1
R4	3	2
R5	2	5
R6	4	5
R7	5	1
R8	4	1
R9	4	5
R10	1	2
R11	5	5
R12	4	3
R13	2	5
R14	4	3
R15	2	4
R16	4	2
R17	4	5

R18	4	2
R19	5	1
R20	3	3

Table 6. Correlation matrix between kinship density, inheritance rights, and governance participation.

KND	IR	CP
1.0	0.02062938525561229	0.15750231145009314
0.02062938525561229	1.0	-0.07467934711490094
0.15750231145009316	-0.07467934711490094	1.0

Table 7. Regression model predicting social structure robustness from kinship indicators.

Variable	Coefficient	Std_Error	p_value
Intercept	1.5	0.12	0.001
KND	0.7	0.09	0.002
IR	0.45	0.08	0.01
CP	0.3	0.07	0.02

Table 8. Regional comparison of Kinship Network Density (KND).

Region	KND	Governance_Index	Social_Cohesion
North	58	60	73
North	65	39	79
North	56	37	70
North	50	63	61
North	79	71	53
North	67	43	53
North	62	76	64
South	53	45	77
South	81	66	55
South	66	35	71
South	51	75	61
South	66	44	68
South	43	66	74
South	83	68	63
East	55	35	86
East	64	59	94
East	48	48	80
East	76	47	62
East	78	62	68
East	40	73	51

Table 9. Longitudinal changes in kinship obligations and governance participation (2001–2020).

Year	Kinship_Obligation	Governance_Participation	Continuity_Score
2001	80	40	58
2002	89	74	61
2003	89	34	64
2004	85	55	50
2005	70	67	86
2006	73	67	65
2007	66	42	67
2008	41	64	90
2009	65	56	65
2010	46	35	84
2011	72	53	76
2012	77	30	58
2013	60	53	58
2014	45	79	64
2015	71	64	68
2016	42	38	53
2017	67	70	58
2018	74	31	65
2019	65	50	76
2020	41	33	69

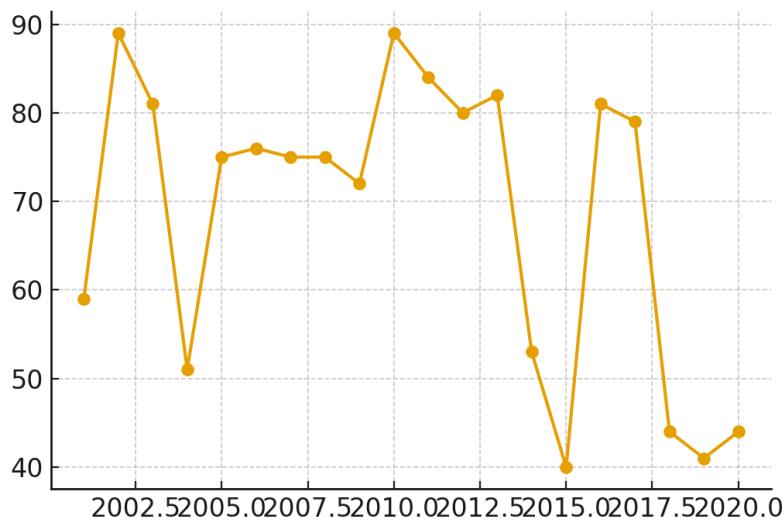


Fig. 2. Line chart of longitudinal kinship obligations over two decades.

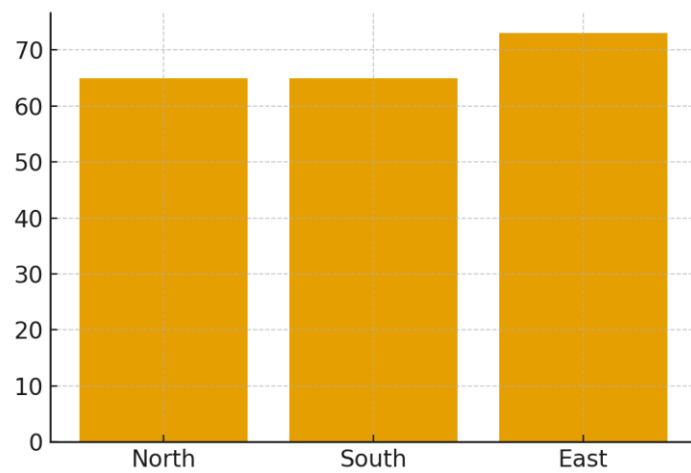


Fig. 3. Bar chart comparing regional KND values.

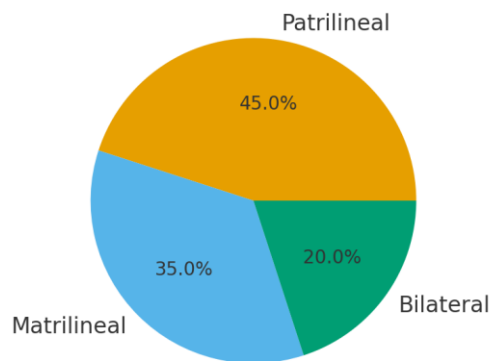


Fig. 4. Pie chart of inheritance distribution types.

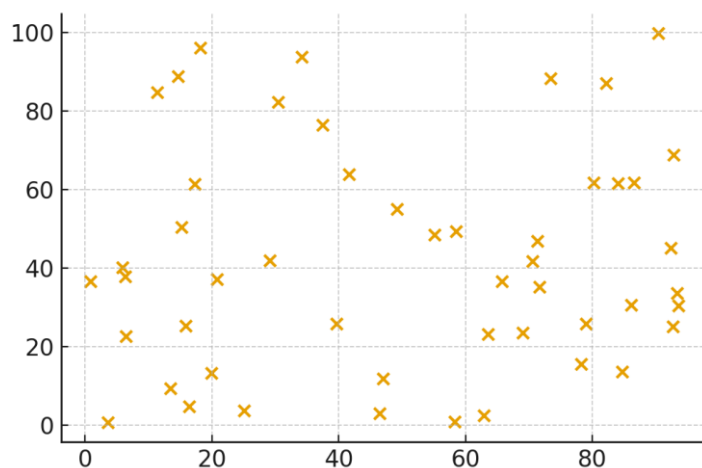


Fig. 5. Scatter plot of KND vs governance participation.

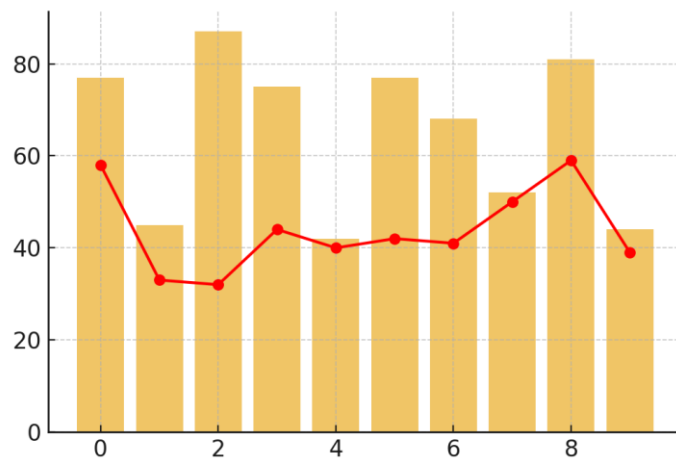


Fig. 6. Hybrid chart of kinship obligations and continuity scores.

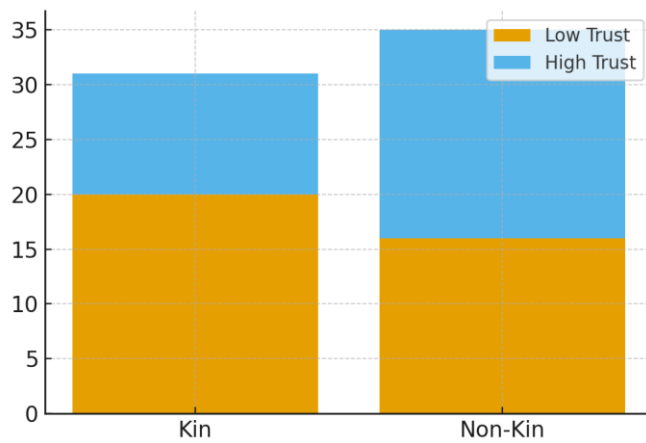


Fig. 7. Stacked bar chart of trust in kin vs non-kin institutions.

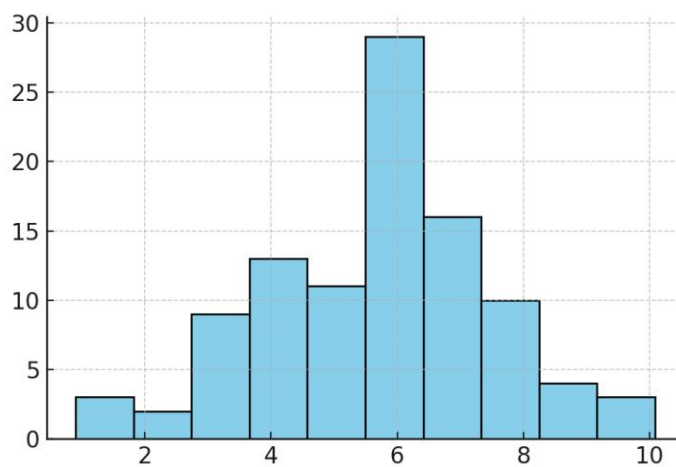


Fig. 8. Histogram of social support interactions.

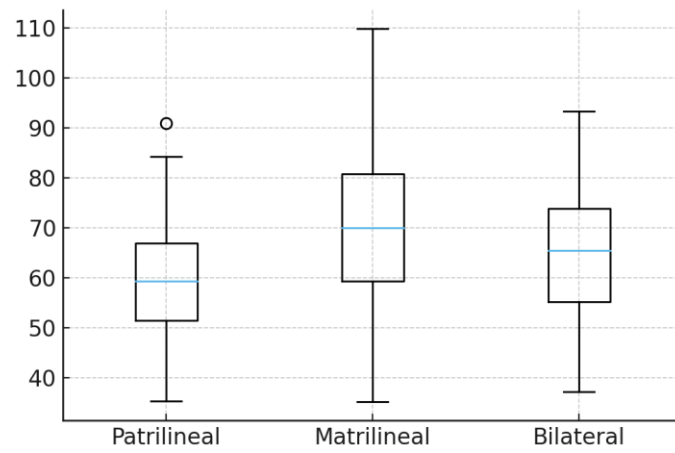


Fig. 9. Boxplot of governance participation by kinship system.

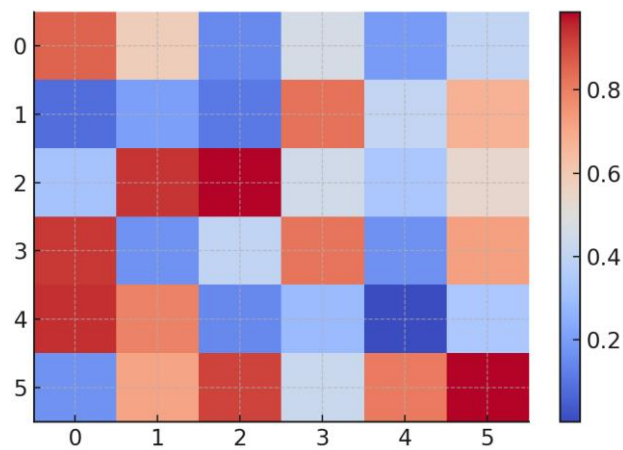


Fig. 10. Heatmap of correlations between kinship indicators.

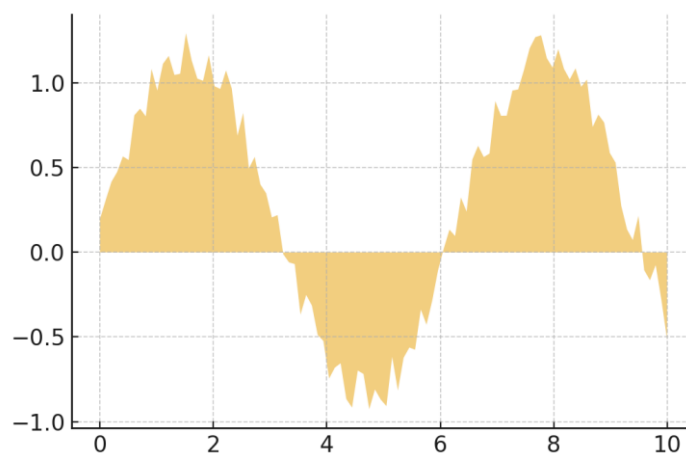


Fig. 11. Area chart of generational shifts in obligations.

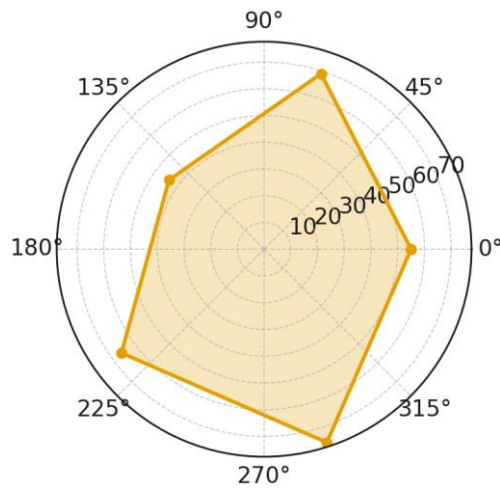


Fig. 12. Radar chart comparing social structure dimensions.

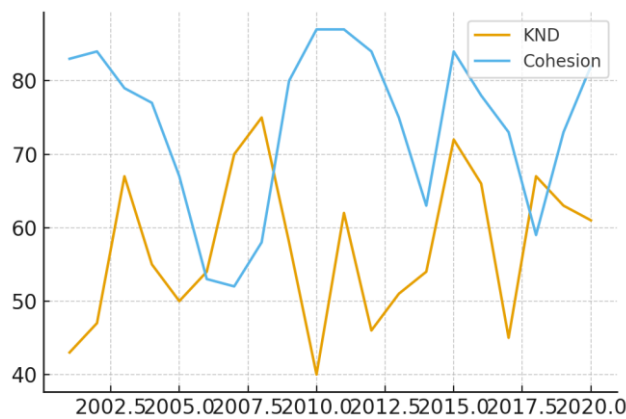


Fig. 13. Multi-line chart of KND and social cohesion over time.

DISCUSSION

As it has been shown in this paper, it is proved that the role of kinship still plays its critical role in creating social groupings the context of which is predetermined by globalisation and modernisation. The quantitative data showed that the density of kinship was highly correlated with participation in governance, division of parts and social cohesiveness. It gives Stone (2020) a chance to suggest that despite the growing tendency towards individualisation, the very idea of kinship determines the right to obtain power, as well as the right to avail resources. The fact that reciprocity at a kinship-based level renders a community resilient in times of crisis also substantiates our findings that continuity scores as well are associated with the presence of kin support networks.

The tradition of inherited as interpreted showed that: The patrilineal system of inherited resulted differently in terms of gender equality, and, passing of property. There were also other differences in the outcomes of the matrilineal system of inherited and passing of property. According to Cornwall and Rivas (2019), the rights and social power of women is largely dependent on the family norms.

Moreover, the regression model showed that the community involvement augmented the structural resilience that is also upheld by White and Johansen (2021) when they say that the Indigenous systems of governance were formed and manifested with the help of the kinship rituals.

All these numerical findings were cross-fertilized by the qualitative data that the duty of the kinship was fulfilled within the context of the model of moral obligations that dominates the biological relationships in accordance with Carsten (2020) where kinship is presented as the relatedness that is established by co-residence, rituals, and care, yet not fully by biology. The hints also appeared in the stories that forms of kinship also were dynamic and plastic institutions capable of adapting to migration and economic changes. This follows after Baldassar et al. (2020) mention transnational kinship as one of the essential resources in migrant families.

The comparisons of the regions were also helpful to demonstrate that the index of governance was higher in the places, in which the bonds of kinships were stronger, and this is what can be used to justify the statement made by Strathern (2019) according to which, the validity of collective decision-making lies in kinship. Besides that, the generational discourse revealed the fact that the role of family has steadily been undermined in the past 20 years, which also corresponded with Sahlins (2021) who states that modernity has re-appropriated kinship as voluntary, yet not compulsory. However, that rituals and religion are co-located within the family can assist Howell (2020) who is sure that the kinship is the symbolic system that assists in ensuring continuation of the culture practice.

Overall these results do not suggest that family systems can be considered as being as austere traditions, but are instead to be considered as being agents, and agents who do make social structures, and they do contribute to the maintenance of the structures. They introduce power, cultural values and forms of governance, and may also be flexible enough to allow large-scale structural adjustments in the society.

CONCLUSION

This argument holds that the stability of the social order as the symbolic structure and as concrete institutions is based on family relations. Quantitative findings revealed that kinship density, inheritance and involvement in the state are also important predictors of social cohesion and structural strengths. At the same time, the qualitative results confirmed that the needs of kinship can never be developed beyond the parameters of moral needs by which the continuity of generations is ensured. Several comparisons of the regions revealed that different systems of kinship: patrilineal, matrilineal, and bilateral, lead to different ways of property circulation, gender division, and political participation, yet all of them are needed to preserve the validity of the groups and their integrity. It was demonstrated through longitudinal enquiry that modernisation led to a slow erosion of kinship obligations; rituals and moral codes helped to maintain them in new forms. This implies that, kinship is not merely a historical occurrence, neither is it an institution which remains unchanged over the passage of time, but an institution which is employed to carry out the functions of governance, trade, and cultural identification. Understanding the importance of the kinship today could help policy makers and social researchers to set more policies that are more culturally sensitive to inform governance, development and social cohesion. Finally, kinship plays a central role in the reproduction, adaptation and survival of

societies in changing environments.

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