

# **Navigating the Nexus: Exploring Family Challenges amidst Migration, Urbanization, Technology, Demographics, and Climate Change**

Rumaya Juhari, Ph. D  
Family, Adolescent & Child Research Center of Excellence (FACE)  
Department of Human Development & Family Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti  
Putra Malaysia

[rumaya@upm.edu.my](mailto:rumaya@upm.edu.my)

## **Introduction**

Megatrends are identical to big waves of change that have a critical and irreversible impact on how we live, our communities, the way money works, and even the planet itself. These long-lasting and substantial changes, including trends in migration, urbanization, demographic shifts, technology advancement, and climate change, create significant and multifaceted challenges for families. Notably, two major areas of concern lie in the impact of megatrends on family socioeconomics and over-all health and well-being.

It is critical to emphasize the use of the Bio-ecological Model, also known as the Socio-ecological model in highlighting the interconnectedness between families and their environments, emphasizing the need for holistic approaches to support family well-being in a rapidly changing world. The model provides a holistic view of the webs of complex interaction between families and their environments at multiple levels or systems. These systems include individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors that stand across and within time. Scrutinizing it from the context of megatrends and their impacts on families, the ecological model offers the depth advantage of understanding the interactions, transactions, and counter influences of how the trends can influence family dynamics.

Within the microsystem, at the individual level, megatrends such as technological advancement can stir and reflect the family's lifestyles, values, and behaviours. The changes in family communication patterns may influence parent-child relationships while the obsessive use of gadgets and social media may alter values towards family time and activities. Technological advancements not only influence communication, work arrangements, and access to information, but also raise concerns about privacy, safety, and digital divides. Ironically, no sector is immune to the transformative power of digitalization, including family, education, and employment.

For interpersonal levels, migrations and urbanizations somewhat change family structures that may in turn affect the availability and accessibility of immediate support systems when nuclear families leave behind their extended family members behind. The demographic changes witnessed families with fewer members and adult children who may be involved in the double generation caregiving activities – of their children and their elderly parents. Migration and urbanization may lead to issues like housing affordability, access to services, and changing family structures and dynamics. The increase in mobility in migration may create both opportunities and challenges for families which may include family dynamics, cultural exchange, and economic inequality. Demographic shifts resulting in aging populations, declining birth rates, and diverse family structures require adjustments in caregiving, relationships, and socio-cultural norms.

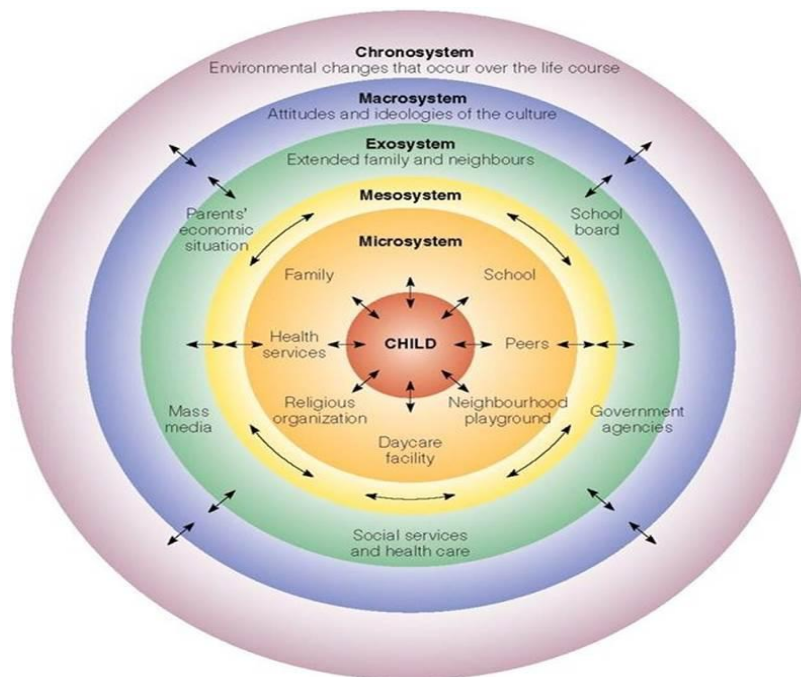


Figure 1: The Bio-ecological Model of Human Development-Urie Bronfenbrenner 1979

Source:[https://www.specialeducationnotes.co.in/Urie%20Bronfenbrenner\\_files/image001.jpg](https://www.specialeducationnotes.co.in/Urie%20Bronfenbrenner_files/image001.jpg)

At the community level, climate change, and economic inequality may lead to difficulties of family members to get access to services and support system. Climate change leads to environmental pressures like extreme weather and resource scarcity which threaten family livelihoods, health, and well-being, potentially leading to displacement. In a nutshell, coping with challenges brought about by megatrends creates a high likelihood of economic inequality that widens income gaps and affects families' access to resources and opportunities, potentially exacerbating social divides and impacting stability, thus impacting overall well-being.

Changes in cultural norms and threats to the loss of a preserved culture and way of life may influence both family dynamics and the way society reacts toward it. An example would be the prevalence of vague gender roles of men and women in the family when women are spending more time being involved in outside-home economic activities. Society may also be affected at large since the policy, norms, values, and economics are borne within this level.

The family-environments interactions and transactions are also explained by Margaret Bubolz and Susan Sontag in their work on the Family Ecology framework that entails how resources within the environment can influence and shape family dynamics.

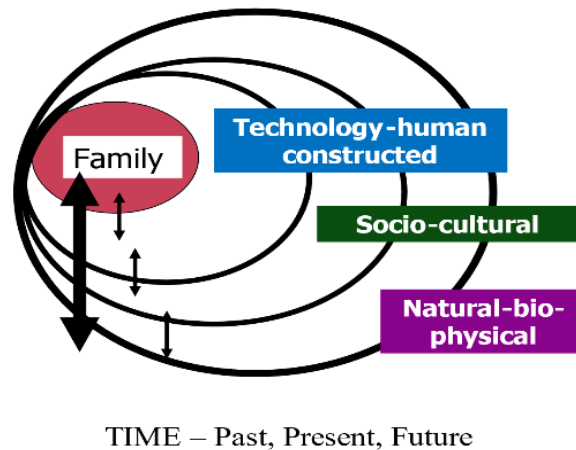


Figure 2: Family Ecosystem Model (Bubolz & Sontag, 1990)

Source: Bubolz, M. M., & Sontag, M. S. (1993). *Human ecology theory. In Sourcebook of family theories and methods: A contextual approach* (pp. 419-450). Boston, MA: Springer US.

## Migration and Urbanization

The number of international migrants globally has steadily increased over the past few decades, reaching an estimated 281 million in 2020, representing 3.6% of the world's population (International Organization for Migration, 2023). Migration acts as a driver of urbanization where individuals often migrate from rural areas to cities seeking better economic opportunities, education, healthcare, and amenities. This influx of people fuels urban growth and development. On the other hand, cities offer job opportunities, higher wages, and improved living standards, attracting migrants and contributing to urbanization. As of 2023, 57% of the world's population lives in urban areas (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2023). Urbanization serves impacts on migration, including creating new opportunities and rural decline. As cities grow, they generate new jobs in various sectors, attracting more migrants, particularly young adults seeking employment and better prospects. Limited opportunities in rural areas, such as a lack of jobs and infrastructure, can push people to migrate to cities, further accelerating urbanization. This interlinkage has led to urban rapid growth, social and economic disparities, and cultural diversity. Rapid urban growth can strain resources like housing, infrastructure, and social services, posing challenges for both migrants and existing residents. According to the National Property Information Centre (NAPIC), a total of 27,746 completed but unsold residential units worth RM18.41 billion were recorded as of the end of December 2022. One of the factors is due to the people's ability to own property, besides the location not meeting demand or suitability.

Apart from the above, social, and economic disparities causing unequal access to opportunities and resources within cities can lead to social segregation and economic inequalities, impacting both migrants and non-migrants. For cultural diversity, migration has brought diverse cultures and perspectives to cities, enriching urban life but also requiring efforts to foster social integration and understanding. Some major differences can be observed between voluntary versus involuntary migrations. A series of legal, socio-cultural, economic, and safety issues may be overarching for families from this group.

## Technology Advancements

The number of internet users globally surpassed 5 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2024), highlighting the widespread accessibility and integration of technology into daily life. The influence of technological progress on families is substantial and complex, affecting numerous facets of family existence. Swift advancements in technology, encompassing automation, artificial intelligence, and digital interconnectedness, are reshaping familial lifestyles, occupations, and interactions. Technology shapes family relationships by altering communication habits, work structures, and availability of information and entertainment. While technology presents possibilities for effectiveness and interconnectedness, it also sparks worries regarding safety, privacy, excessive screen time, and disparities in digital access among family members. Among the major aspects of how technological advancement influences family are as follows:

Accessibility of Information: The internet provides instant access to a vast amount of information, allowing family members to research, learn, and solve problems together. This can enhance education, support decision-making processes, and promote a culture of continuous learning within the family.

Communication: Technology facilitates easier and faster communication between family members, regardless of physical distance. Tools such as smartphones, social media, video calls, and messaging apps enable families to stay connected and share updates, fostering closer relationships even when members are geographically dispersed. However, increased reliance on digital devices and social media may lead to reduced face-to-face interaction, communication breakdowns, and a lack of quality time spent together, affecting familial relationships and well-being.

Parenting and Child Development: Technology offers numerous resources for parenting, including apps for tracking developmental milestones, educational games and programs for children, and online communities where parents can seek advice and support. However, excessive screen time and exposure to inappropriate content are concerns that parents must navigate in this digital age. Cyberbullying, online sexual harassment, and concerns about children's excessive passivity leave parents in vague situations on how to practice digital parenting. There have been concerns raised on how young children prefer to stay indoors, lack verbal and writing skills, and lose interest and skills in playing traditional games that are more physical and outdoor in nature.

Work-Life Balance: Remote work and flexible work arrangements made possible by technology can impact family dynamics by blurring the boundaries between work and home life. This is evident during the pandemic of Covid-19 where technology has enabled a more flexible work arrangement for some related jobs. While technology enables greater flexibility for parents to balance career and family responsibilities, it can also lead to challenges in setting boundaries and managing time effectively.

Generational Divide: Technology can sometimes exacerbate generational differences within families, with younger members often more adept at using and embracing new technologies compared to older generations. Bridging this digital divide may require patience, understanding, and mutual learning among family members of different ages.

Entertainment and Leisure: Technology provides a wide range of entertainment options for families, from streaming services and gaming platforms to virtual reality experiences. Some of the options include the opportunity to do these activities in the privacy of one's own home.

While these technologies can facilitate shared leisure activities and family bonding, they also raise concerns about screen addiction, sedentary lifestyles, and the erosion of traditional family pastimes.

Privacy, Safety, and Security: The increasing integration of technology into daily life raises concerns about privacy and security within families. Parents must navigate issues such as online safety, monitoring children's online activities, and protecting personal data from cyber threats.

Overall, while technology offers numerous benefits for families in terms of communication, access to information, and convenience, it also presents challenges that require thoughtful management and adaptation. Effective communication, digital literacy, and mindful technology use can help families harness the benefits of technology while mitigating its potential negative impacts.

### **Demographic Shifts**

According to the United Nations, the number of individuals aged 65 and above is projected to reach 1.5 billion by 2050, doubling compared to 2017. This trend is particularly pronounced in developed countries like Japan, but also presents challenges for many developing nations. These demographic changes, including an aging population and declining birth rates, have profound impacts on families, specifically altering family dynamics and caregiving responsibilities. Aging populations may require increased care and support from family members while declining birth rates can potentially influence intergenerational relationships and caregiving responsibilities. Changes in family structures, such as the rise of single-parent households or multigenerational living arrangements, reflect shifting social norms, economic pressures, and insecurities. Cross-cultural marriages and non-traditional family arrangements may create cultural concerns.

For example, findings from a national survey in Malaysia (Jawahir et al., 2021) indicate among adults who provide informal care, high-intensity caregivers are those who are actively employed and provide longer durations of care compared to low-intensity caregivers. The caregivers reported their own share of burdens which included deteriorated physical and socio-emotional health.

### **Climate Change and Environmental Pressures**

Environmental pressures, such as extreme weather events, pollution, and resource scarcity, can impact family livelihoods, health, and well-being. Families may face displacement due to natural disasters or environmental degradation, leading to disruptions in their lives and communities. Extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and resource scarcity can lead to displacement, property damage, loss of livelihoods, and adverse health impacts, exacerbating inequalities and vulnerabilities within communities. According to a report by the National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA) on recent flooding occurring in east coast Malaysia (Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, Johor), in December 2023, a total of 23, 008 flood victims were recorded at evacuation centres. Bad air pollution at the end of 2022 has caused the postponement of school sessions where school sessions are expected to start in February instead of January. A study conducted in Indonesia by Rudianto (2021) found that natural disasters have a detrimental impact on household poverty.

## Impacts

The ultimate impact of the megatrends lies in the capacity and capability of families to cope with the situation. One of two major impacts would be socio-economic inequality which can eventually influence family outcomes and well-being. Income disparities create social divides, limiting access to various kinds of key resources like education and healthcare. Family stress can eventually lead to family instability and many other major negative outcomes for members of the family as well as the family.

The other major impact would be on family health and well-being. Developmentally, different needs at different stages of the lifecycle can be influenced by the challenges that are brought by the megatrends and the ability of the individuals involved, as well as the family to cope with them. Major life events such as family formation, family expansion, family consolidation, family maturation, and family dissolution are highly prone to the impacts that megatrends. The formation of various family structures and types, the high expectations of parental roles for childcare and aged care, and the challenging contexts may leave families with multiple roles and responsibilities while having limited resources and support to survive the ordeal.

As the fundamental unit of society, families must be resilient, resourceful, and capable of playing their roles in shaping the trajectory of the megatrends. Adaptation remains the key tool in facing the challenges. It is crucial to empower families with support systems, resources, and opportunities to enhance families' coping mechanisms. At a macro level, fostering resilience, stability, and cohesion, and promoting evidence-based driven family-friendly policies and programs can better assist families to navigate the challenges, and benefit from the opportunities brought along by the megatrends. More importantly, proactive measures to address the impacts of megatrends on vulnerable populations, such as low-income families, marginalized communities, and future generations, are essential for building a more equitable and sustainable future for families worldwide.

Rapid societal changes and uncertainties associated with megatrends can contribute to psychological stress and mental health challenges for families. Economic pressures, social isolation, environmental concerns, and career instability may exacerbate anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders among family members.

Some experts have noted on how globalization and cultural homogenization can erode traditional cultural practices, languages, and identities within families and communities. Rapid social and technological changes may challenge traditional value systems, intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and cultural cohesion, leading to cultural dislocation and identity crises.

## Way forward

Informing policy on the impact and challenges of megatrends requires a multidisciplinary approach that integrates research findings, stakeholder perspectives, and evidence-based strategies. Policies should aim to address the following:

- Family Empowerment Through Education and Skill Development
- Enhancing Family & Community Resilience and Social Cohesion
- Strengthening Social Protection and Support Systems:
- Promoting Economic Opportunities and Financial Inclusion:
- Supporting Sustainable Urban Development and Housing:
- Harnessing Technology for Family Well-being
- Strengthening Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience

By prioritizing family empowerment as a cornerstone of policymaking in the face of megatrends, we can build stronger, more resilient families and communities, enhance social equity, and create pathways for inclusive and sustainable development. Using the right and effective policy method and tool may enable a better impact of the policy on families. One of the tools that can be considered is the Family Impact Assessment (FIA). As a policy tool, FIA is used to evaluate the potential impacts of policies, programs, or projects on families by considering the interrelationships of various factors that may affect families' functioning, well-being, and resilience. Both positive and negative consequences of proposed actions on different family structures, demographics, and socio-economic groups. Therefore, even at the initial stage, potential problems must be scrutinized, and mitigation measures must be considered before the policy or programme is implemented.

At the policy level, the Family Impact Assessment (FIA), the Ecological Model, and Megatrends are interconnected through their shared focus on understanding the complex interactions between families and their environments, including broader societal changes. FIA, the Ecological Model, and Megatrends intersect in their shared focus on understanding and addressing the impacts of broader societal changes on families.

Lastly, having a good policy is secondary to ensuring quality and evidence-based policy implementation. It is critical to establish intersectoral coordination mechanisms and partnerships between government agencies, civil society organizations, academia, and private sector stakeholders to facilitate the implementation of family empowerment policies. Consequently, monitoring and evaluation frameworks must be established to track the progress and impact of policy interventions on family well-being, resilience, and empowerment, using data-driven approaches and stakeholder feedback to inform policy adjustments and continuous improvement. Concerted efforts need to be in place to increase public awareness, stakeholder engagement, and participatory decision-making processes in policy development and implementation, ensuring that the voices and priorities of families are heard and integrated into policy responses.

## Reference

1. <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2023/04/1089847/lebih-27000-kediaman-siap-bina-tidak-terjual-tahun-lalu>
2. Jawahir, S., Tan, E. H., Tan, Y. R. O., Mohd Noh, S. N., & Ab Rahim, I. (2021). The impacts of caregiving intensity on informal caregivers in Malaysia: findings from a national survey. *BMC health services research*, 21(1), 391.
3. Sahani, M., Othman, H., Kwan, S. C., Juneng, L., Ibrahim, M. F., Hod, R., ... & Rosli, Y. (2022). Impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on children in Malaysia. *Frontiers in public health*, 10, 909779.
4. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2023). World Urbanization Prospects 2023: The 2023 Revision. <https://population.un.org/wup/>
5. International Organization for Migration. (2023). World Migration Report 2023: <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/>
6. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2020). World Urban Report 2020: The City We Need. [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/11/world\\_cities\\_report\\_2020\\_abridged\\_v  
ersion.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/11/world_cities_report_2020_abridged_version.pdf)
7. <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/kpm-tanggung-cadangan-kembalikan-sesi-persekolahan-bermula-januari-396090>
8. Rudianto, D. (2021). *Pengaruh Bencana Alam terhadap Kemiskinan di Indonesia* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Gadjah Mada).
9. Statista. (2024, January). Global internet user penetration 2014-2024 [Chart]. Retrieved February 24, 2024, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/325706/global-internet-user-penetration/>
10. Malaysian Family Impact Assessment: Final Report (2021). Kuala Lumpur: LPPKN.