



Zero Kinship and Social Pressure

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The author has consistently attempted to explore how kinship and friendship are defined across different societies and cultures—and more importantly, how they are actually practiced in real-life, day-to-day interactions. The core concern is not just understanding the structural definitions, but also examining how these relationships adapt—or erode—amid social change.

Through the concept of “Zero Kinship,” the author seeks to analyze a specific scenario: where formal relationships (like familial or marital ties) exist on paper and in societal recognition, but their functional expression—the obligations, emotional closeness, and supportive interactions—are practically absent. It’s about the growing dissonance between “being related” and “acting like it.”

In today's world, marked by modernity, globalization, and rapid population growth, people are increasingly unable to live with their families in one place. The combined pressure of urban migration and limited resources forces individuals to disperse. As a result, marriage and family become more about fulfilling social and reproductive obligations than maintaining everyday relational intimacy. People might formally come together under one roof to marry or raise children, but soon after, they are physically and emotionally distanced due to personal ambitions, professional demands, or economic compulsions.

This is the essence of Zero Kinship—a situation where people may be tied through blood or marriage, but real connection, presence, and duty toward each other become minimal, even symbolic.



One of the most significant forces that deepen Zero Kinship is economic pressure. With science and technology promising greater material comforts, individuals are caught in the grind to earn more, do more, and survive in an increasingly competitive economy. In this relentless pursuit, they become so consumed by debt, long working hours, and income insecurity that family ties begin to dissolve—not legally, but emotionally and practically.

Even when people attempt to bridge these gaps through phone calls, letters, or virtual meetings, the “absence of presence” still defines the relationship. Emotional availability remains at zero, reinforcing the Zero Kinship framework.

To explore this further, the author conducted a case study in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, examining a single extended family unit. The findings reflect a familiar scenario: siblings born to the same parents, who once shared a primary kinship bond, grow apart after forming their own nuclear families. Despite their shared lineage, the roles of an uncle (mama) or aunt (mausi) slowly diminish in the everyday lives of each other’s children.

The study spotlights a specific situation from 11th June 2025: A married woman visits her brother’s home (a traditional act of kinship reaffirmation). In Indian culture, her presence is supposed to be met with respect and hospitality—not only by her brother but also by his wife. Similarly, the brother is expected to fulfil his duties as a maternal uncle and host.

Now, enter the complexity of roles: The husband (A) and wife (B) are the primary kinship unit. A’s sister (C) visits them. At the same time, B expects her own brother (D) to visit her and uphold similar social norms—bringing gifts for her and her children, for example.

However, D is economically struggling. He does not want to say this out loud or admit his financial weakness. To fulfill the expected social etiquette, he’d need to spend money on travel, sweets, and gifts for both his sister and her husband’s sister (his sister-in-



law). Even when leaving, some token money or gifts are expected, all of which becomes a burden for D.

Faced with this unspoken yet rigid social expectation, D makes excuses—workload, health issues—and avoids visiting altogether. He hopes to maintain relationships, but without disclosing his financial limitations. Ironically, this silence and distance only strengthen the reality of Zero Kinship.

This case illustrates the economic roots of relational distancing. It shows how shame, pride, and social expectations compound financial stress, compelling individuals to opt out of their kinship duties altogether. The result? An ever-widening relational void hidden beneath polite pretences.

In conclusion, Zero Kinship is not just a concept; it's a lived reality shaped by economics, migration, and modern lifestyles. And while the relationships may technically still exist, their emotional and functional emptiness can no longer be ignored.

Cracks in Primary Kinship: A Case of Silent Withdrawal

A and B are husband and wife respectively and D is brother of A's wife. B calls her brother D on the phone and asks him directly, “Is there any problem that’s stopping you from coming?” But D hides the truth—he doesn’t reveal that financial constraints are the real reason behind his reluctance. Instead, he vaguely says there are some problems at his own home, making it difficult for him to visit.

Meanwhile, sister B shares her own emotional burden over the call. She expresses frustration that her primary kinship partner—her husband A—is failing to fulfill even the most basic household responsibilities. He constantly complains about his health and uses it as an excuse to avoid any duties. Even when mice in the house have chewed through the washing machine wires and torn up the sofa set, he refuses to act. She stresses that it’s become necessary to install mesh screens under both the washing



machine and the sofas, but her husband A avoids taking action under the pretense of illness.

The deeper truth? A simply doesn't want to spend money on household issues. He deflects everything onto B because she has a job and earns well. A expects her to shoulder all expenses, while he contributes little. This dynamic causes deep resentment in B. She feels that her husband doesn't acknowledge the pressure and mental load she's constantly under. As a result, she lives in a state of stress and exhaustion.

The toll is physical as well: B now suffers from a urinary tract infection, has developed a painful lump in her breast, and struggles to walk due to arthritis. And yet, despite all this, what she truly desires isn't money or material ease—she simply wants empathy. She wants her husband, whom she chose to marry, to stand beside her, to understand her pain, and to be present.

She wants happiness for her son and family, not luxuries—but above all, she wants her labor, sacrifices, and pain to be seen. But this deep emotional vacuum causes the very foundation of primary kinship—between husband and wife—to begin to fracture.

In a country like India, where marriage defines the most vital form of primary kinship, we are now increasingly witnessing such relationships heading toward family courts. More and more women are seeking divorce not because of violence or infidelity, but because of emotional neglect and unmet responsibilities. They are using divorce as a way to assert that a husband must fulfill the role expected of him in the kinship structure. If he does not, then separation becomes not just a choice, but a statement.

This reveals a harsh truth: Zero Kinship is no longer a subtle undercurrent—it is now an open crisis. It's pushing marriage, as a cultural institution, toward instability and fragmentation.

What's even more striking is that B hopes her brother D will visit—not just to see him, but because she believes that his presence might compel her husband to act more



responsibly. She hopes it might spark some change in A's behavior, perhaps reminding him of his duties.

But D, knowing all this, still doesn't come—not because he doesn't care, but because he's financially struggling. And he doesn't want to disclose this vulnerability. Ironically, this makes him another participant in the same kinship vacuum. He becomes yet another absent kin—a brother whose role exists in theory, but not in practice.

So while these relationships—husband-wife, brother-sister—exist clearly on the cultural map, in practice, they are riddled with distance, withdrawal, and silence. This disconnect between formal kinship and real behavior is the beating heart of Zero Kinship.

Another example clearly illustrates the extent to which economic factors are involved in the concept of "zero kinship."

During the course of the research, the author observed a case where a man, without fulfilling his familial responsibilities, abandoned his wife and children and moved far away from home. In his absence, the wife was forced to take up a job to provide for her children. Gradually, she began managing not only their education and daily meals but also took care of all household chores.

Due to a lack of financial stability, she couldn't afford domestic help for tasks like washing clothes, cleaning utensils, and cooking. As a result, she had to juggle both household responsibilities and her job outside. Watching their mother toil like this every day, the children developed a deep respect for her—honoring her sacrifices and relentless efforts.

However, the father—having neglected his primary kinship responsibilities—became the subject of growing emotional indifference among the children. They neither spoke of him respectfully, nor did they even wish to mention him at all.



The researcher further found that, after several years of living away, the father returned home. But this time, the family did not accept him. He was not even allowed to enter the house. The family told him point-blank:

"When you didn't fulfill any of your responsibilities and left your wife and children to fend for themselves, you have no right to return here."

He was humiliated and thrown out of the house. A few days later, local police reported that an unclaimed body had been found on the road. Through the Aadhaar number and the address, it was confirmed that the man was indeed the same estranged father.

When the police informed the family, the children outright refused to claim the body. They expressed their anger, saying:

"What has he ever done for us? We don't consider him our father. We neither want to take his body nor perform his last rites."

This rejection by the children—"What has he ever done for us?"—speaks volumes. It clearly shows that mere biological ties or kinship labels aren't enough. If one does not perform the expected roles within those ties, especially in lived, practical terms, then those ties dissolve into what the researcher calls "zero kinship."

In this case, the man's distancing from the duties of a father and husband created a situation where, even after death, he was nothing more than a biological figure. He was not accepted as a cultural human being—someone socially and emotionally integrated into the family. Nor was his death honored with the cultural and familial rites typically afforded to a family member.

Therefore, in the context of zero kinship, it is crucial to understand that simply studying kinship ties is not enough. What's more important is understanding the practical and functional roles embedded within those ties—and how society recognizes or disregards them based on their actual fulfilment.



In today's world, it seems that almost every society is increasingly orbiting around this concept of zero kinship—where symbolic ties hold no weight unless backed by real responsibility and relational integrity.

This case study exemplifies how the concept of zero kinship extends beyond biological ties and is significantly shaped by economic and functional responsibilities. The researcher observed a scenario where a man abandoned his wife and children, neglecting all familial obligations. In response, the wife took on dual roles: securing employment to support her children while also managing all domestic responsibilities due to financial constraints.

Over time, the children developed deep respect for their mother's sacrifices. Conversely, their emotional detachment from their father grew, as he had failed to fulfill even the minimal expectations of a paternal role. When the father attempted to return home after years of absence, the family refused to accept him. They denied him entry and rejected any form of reconciliation, asserting that his abandonment had disqualified him from re-entering the family unit.

Subsequently, upon his death, the children refused to claim his body or perform his final rites, stating, "What has he ever done for us?" This rejection indicates a complete erosion of kinship recognition. The biological connection was rendered void due to the lack of practical, emotional, and economic participation in family life.

The case highlights that kinship, in practice, is not sustained solely by blood relations but through the performance of culturally and socially defined roles. In the absence of this performance, a state of zero kinship emerges—where the individual, though biologically related, holds no social or emotional significance within the family structure. This phenomenon reflects a growing global trend, where symbolic kinship is increasingly contingent upon lived responsibilities and relational accountability.
