Structural arrangements of Indo-Guyanese family:
An assessment of the assimilation hypothesis

Preethy S. Samuel, PhD
Research Associate,
Wayne State University, Detroit, MI

Leon C. Wilson, PhD
Professor, Department of Sociology
East Carolina University, NC

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ABSTRACT

Despite the acknowledgment of pluralism, Caribbean family literature often focuses on the Afro-Caribbean family and does not satisfactorily address the issues of the Indo-Caribbean family. This paper examines whether the Indo-Guyanese differ from the dominant culture of the Anglophone Caribbean in the structural arrangements of the family. Findings from secondary analysis of cross-sectional data of Guyana collected in 2004, suggest that the Indo-Guyanese significantly differ from the Afro-Guyanese in the structural arrangements of the family. Indo-Guyanese were more likely to be in marital unions and have longer marriages than the other racial groups, even when controlled for age. These differences suggest that the present day Indo-Guyanese have not assimilated into the dominant Creole culture, but have retained their cultural traits at least in the structural domain of the family. Hence it was concluded that “Guyanization” appears to be an ongoing process rather than a completed phenomenon in the familial domain of the Indo-Guyanese.
ABSTRACT IN FRENCH

En dépit de la reconnaissance du pluralisme, de la littérature des Caraïbes souvent la famille se concentre sur les Afro-Caraïbes famille et ne pas répondre de façon satisfaisante les questions de l'indo-Caraïbes famille. Cette étude examine si les Indo-guyanais diffèrent de la culture dominante de la Caraïbe anglophone dans les arrangements structurels de la famille. Les résultats de l'analyze secondaire des données transversales de la Guyane recueillies en 2004, donnent à penser que les Indo-guyanais sensiblement différer de l'afro-guyanais dans l'agencement de la structure de la famille. Indo-Guyanais étaient plus susceptibles d'être en unions et les mariages ont plus que les autres groupes raciaux, même lorsque le contrôle de l'âge. Ces différences donnent à penser que le jour indo-guyanais ne sont pas assimilés dans la culture dominante créole, mais ont conservé leurs traits culturels au moins dans le domaine structurel de la famille. Par conséquent, il a été conclu que "Guyanization" semble être un processus continu plutôt que comme un phénomène achevé dans le domaine familial de l'indo-guyanais.
ABSTRACT IN SPANISH

A pesar del reconocimiento de pluralismo, la literatura sobre la familia caribeña seguido se enfoca en la familia Afro-Caribeña y no se dirige satisfactoriamente hacia las cuestiones de la familia Indo-Caribeña. Este documento examina si es que los Indo-Guyaneses se diferencian de la cultura dominante de los Caribeños de habla Inglesa en los arreglos estructurales de la familia. Los resultados de la analisis secundaria de la datos de corte transversal de Guyana colectada en el año 2004, sugiere que los Indo-Guyaneses difieren significantemente de los Afro-Guyaneses en lo referente a los arreglos estructurales de la familia. Las familias Indo-Guyanesas tienden a estar en unions matrimoniales, y, de tener matrimonies mas largos en comparacion de los otros grupos raciales, aun cuando son controlados por la edad. Estas diferencias sugieren que los Indo-Guyaneses de esta epoca no han sido asimilados hacia la cultura dominante Creolla, pero que han mantenido sus rasgos culturales, de perdido en lo que se refiere al dominio estructural de la familia. Por lo tanto se concluyo que la “Guyanizacion” parece ser un proceso en curso en vez de una situacion terminada cuando se refiere a la dominacion familiar de los Indo-Guyaneses.
BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

Nearly 150 years ago the Indians from South Asia (also known as *East Indians*) entered the Caribbean as indentured agricultural laborers. Today they are not a "beleaguered minority" as there is no formal discrimination against them, but neither are they integrated into the ‘Creole’ way of life (Cross, 1980, p. 3). The Indo-Caribbean people remain culturally distinct in more ways than one. According to Klass, who studied the Indians in Trinidad, “the whole way of life of the [Indo-Trinidadians] is that of an *Indian community* and not that of a *West Indian community*” (Schlesinger, 1968, p.153). The Indo-Caribbean people are a numerical minority in the Caribbean, with the exception of Guyana. Thus, they remain a minority group in the Caribbean from both a numerical and cultural standpoint.

The Caribbean refers to a heterogeneous group of islands, situated in the Caribbean Sea from the north coast of Venezuela in South America to the south coast of Florida in the United States and consists of ethnically diverse people due to the history of British, French, Dutch and Spanish colonialism. While most countries have gained independence, some still remain as French and American colonies (Baptiste, Hardy, Lewis, 1997), and the 15 countries comprising the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & Grenadines, Surinam, and Trinidad & Tobago. These countries are politically independent of each other but there is a high rate of intra-regional migration. The cultural landscape of the Anglophone Caribbean (a term used to describe the English speaking countries of the Caribbean) is influenced in part by the British-European culture given their colonial history. The Afro-
Caribbeans are believed to have adopted more aspects of the British-European culture than the Indo-Caribbeans. A unique combination of the British-European orientation and significant remnants of West African and East Indian traditions, constitutes the cultural landscape of Guyana.

The largest concentration of persons of Indian origin is in Guyana (43.5%), which is followed by Trinidad (41%) and Surinam (35%). They comprise below 5% of the population of Jamaica, Guadeloupe, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, and Grenada (Bureau of Statistics, 2002; CIA World Fact Book, 2002). Despite their minority status in the Caribbean, researchers observe that Indians have tried to hold on to their socio-cultural baggage (Pitsch, 1999). A closer examination of the literature, however suggests that it is not clear whether the Indians have remained an ethnically separate group or have blended into the dominant Creole culture of the Caribbean. Some scholars have observed cultural continuity among the Indians who live in the Caribbean (Klass, 1961; Niehoff & Niehoff, 1960; Rauf, 1972), while others argue for acculturation through the phenomenon of Creolization (Angrosino, 1976; Nevadosky, 1980; Smith & Jayawardena, 1959).

Current theories of assimilation and continued efforts to strengthen ties with their original homeland, would suggest that the Indian family patterns are dynamic and continue to evolve. Although the period of indentureship caused a disruption of the traditional Indian family system, many of the traditions like joint family, dowry, caste system, caste endogamy were revived by the twentieth century (Mohammed, 1997). On the contrary others argue that modernization influences have led to a mitigation of cultural differences in Guyana (Jeffrey & Baber, 1986). Limited quantitative empirical data on Indians living in the Caribbean, however, make it difficult to make precise
assessments and predictions about the nature of their family patterns. Nonetheless, we cannot continue to ignore the racial and ethnic distinctions in family patterns and relationships in the region because race and ethnicity are fundamental to our identity both as individuals and as families.

Ethnicity is socially constructed, rather than genetically determined; it represents our link to the past and is important to the psychological sense of survival (Keyes, 1981, Matthews & Wilson, 1999). It is the embodiment of shared beliefs, norms, values, preferences, in-group memories, loyalties and consciousness of kind (Schermbran, 1978). Family ethnicity is the sum total of our ancestry and cultural dimensions and it is becoming an increasingly important concept (McAdoo, 1993). An understanding of the racial/ethnic differences in marriage and family values will enable researchers to be aware of the current societal and cultural prescriptions, prejudices, biases and stereotypes that are part of the familial domain (Roopnarine & Brown, 1997). Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to quantitatively examine if the Indo-Guyanese differ from the other racial/ethnic groups in the structural arrangements of the marriage and family.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The Indian family is the most important institution that has survived through the ages and is critical to understanding the Indian society (Medora, Larson & Dave, 2000; D’Cruz & Bharat, 2001). The joint family also known as the “classical extended family” (Ishwaran, 1974, p. 176) is the most widely desired residential unit especially of the higher castes, which ideally consists of three or four patrilineally related generations living together under one roof (Madan, 1963). The primary benefit of the joint family is the economic security that it provides through joint land ownership. As such low-caste
families, who were not typically landowners, are not often represented in this idealized family type in the Indian culture.

According to Shah (1998) it is inaccurate to use the slogan, “from joint family to elementary (nuclear or individual) families” (p. 52) to describe the complex social change of the Indian family institution. Although the joint family is an integral part of the Indian culture, a popular but inaccurate belief is that this family type is disintegrating due to the effects of urbanization and modernization (Chekki, 1974; Shah, 1974). The view that the joint family is being transformed into a modified extended family is more widely accepted by scholars (Freed & Freed, 1982; Ishwaran, 1974; Shah, 1998). It is argued that even the most modern Indian nuclear family has some amount of jointness in various structural and functional aspects (Medora et al, 2000).

According to Jayawardena (1968, p. 439) “The patrilenial extended family is an ideal norm in almost all overseas Indian communities” (Africa [East & South], Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Fiji and the Caribbean). Several factors such as ties with the homeland, type of emigration (individual vs. group), work status (laborer vs. trader), and policies of the host country, influenced the assumed change in the structure of the family. The Indian immigrants to the Caribbean were exposed to two diverse family forms: colonial nuclear family and Afro-Caribbean concubinage, both of which were very different from their traditional family form (Niehoff & Neihoff, 1960). The process of emigration was the first step in the breaking up family units because the recruitment process focused on eligible individuals and not on family units. The breakdown of the caste system due to plantation life style and shortage of eligible single women, lack of landownership were other factors influencing the changes of the traditional Indian family
structure (Sharma, 1986; Smith 1959). Nonetheless, the Indo-Guyanese family is a very close band of extended lineage, which includes two, three and often four generations living in close proximity (Ally, 1990).

The statistical reality however is that among the Indo-Guyanese, the nuclear family is the most common residential unit, and the phase of an extended family unit is usually brief and transitory in nature. It is not uncommon to find a married son staying with his father for a brief time, until he has gained the financial independence to establish his own residence (Jayawardena, 1968). The norms of extended family and kinship obligations have weakened over time and currently less than a quarter of the Indian families in the Caribbean are in extended families (Barrow, 1999; Sharma, 1986). Extended families of the Afro-Caribbeans usually refer to residence with maternal in-laws, while paternal in-laws are integral in Indo-Caribbean extended families (Nettles, 1995). The Indian nuclear family in the Caribbean is not similar to the Western notion of an isolated unit but is intimately linked to a wider group of kin (Jayawardena, 1962). Extended-family households are more prevalent among the Indians in East Africa and Fiji. In the Ceylonese plantations (Sri Lanka) although nuclear families were predominant, it was found that the Indian immigrants “placed a high value on the ability to maintain a patrilineal extended family”, despite the absence of landownership (Jayawardena, 1968, p 441).

In the traditional Indian culture, the extended family is considered a better alternative to the nuclear family. Conformity is valued over self identity and self expression. Group identity and cohesiveness is stressed and a conservative and compliant orientation is rewarded (Medora, et.al, 2000). Indian marriages have been aptly described
as a union of families rather than a union of two individuals (P.P. M. Finny, personal communication, August 30, 2005). Marriage is central to the Indian family and is often not the result of individual efforts but due to combined familial efforts. Arranging a marriage is considered a critical responsibility of parents and older relatives in the family. The arranged marriage is still prevalent in the Indian culture, even among the educated middle class of urban India (Agarwal, 1991; Medora, et.al 2000). Most marriages in India and in the Caribbean are arranged by parents with varying degrees of choice given to the young couple entering the relationship (Mohammed, 2002 & Munasinghe, 2001).

There are three main types of mating unions in the Caribbean namely: visiting unions, common law unions and married unions (Iffil, 2003; Roberts, 1955; Roopnarine & Brown, 1997). In 1960, 82% of the Indo-Trinidian women were married, while 15% were in common-law unions and only 3% of women were in visiting unions. Two decades later only 74% of the Indo-Trinidian women were married while nearly 7% of them were in visiting unions (Sharma, 1986). This trend of decreasing rates of marriage and increasing rates of visiting unions could be explained by effects of Creolization. Currently, 32.5% of the female-headed households are Indo-Guyanese while the majority is Afro-Guyanese (IWRAW, 1999). According to Sharma (1986), the lower castes of Indians had an acceptable practice named Baithana which was comparable to common-law unions. Indo-Caribbean people tend to be critical of the principle of common-law and visiting unions, but are tolerant of such alternate family forms in practice, as evidenced by Munasinghe’s study of the village of Cambio in Trinidad (2001).

Divorce is not very common in the traditional Indian culture, nevertheless it cannot be concluded that all Indians are very happy in their relationships. Many Indian
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couples live together even though they do not like each other because they fear the social disapproval of divorce. Traditional religious Hindu women turn to religion and learn to cope with the pressures of marriage life through the teachings of the scriptures. The socialization of young girls in patrifocal households, early arranged marriages, low levels of education and the consequent financial dependence on males can explain in part why women strive towards marital stability. According to Nettles (1995), who compared and contrasted the mating and family patterns of Indo- and Afro-Caribbean women, Indo-Caribbean women are often married early and socialized to believe and expect a life long commitment and it is only after the break-up of the first marriage, that they move into visiting or common-law unions. In contrast, literature suggests that Afro-Caribbean women tend to become involved in visiting unions and may have children before they decide to marry or cohabit in matrifocal households.

Persistence of Indian cultural values appear to have slowed the loss of patrifocality among the Indo-Guyanese families (Jayawardena, 1962), although researchers have been predicting a trend towards matrifocality, given that younger Indian couples are engaging in premarital sex and entering visiting unions (Barrow, 1999). Acculturation influences are generally perceived as the majority group influencing the minority group to conform to the mould of the majority. According to Munasinghe (2001), the persistence of the Indian marriage and household patterns in Trinidad in spite of the loss of critical features such as the caste system, jajamani patron-client system, the panchayat system, and loss of several Hindu family ideals is the result of “ethnic homogenization which is endemic to Trinidad rather than cultural survival” (p. 162). Traditional social psychology is skewed towards the influences of majority groups on
minorities. However, considerable work by European social psychologists, speak to the subtle, insidious power of minority influence (Moscovici and Mugny 1983; Mugny and Perez (1991).

In general, influence theorists argue that majority is synonymous with power, ascendancy and social control (Moscovici and Mugny, 1983). As such the expectation is assimilation and dependency of the minority group because of asymmetry in status relative to the majority group. In the case of Indians in the Caribbean, the issue has to do with resistance to change as a function of the statuses held by the group. While resistance to change is itself a form of social influence, we suggest that the economic status of Indians in the Caribbean, and political ascendancy in the case of Guyana account for a significant portion of such resistance. The power of wealth and political prowess represent disincentives for the majority to pressure changes in the Indian culture and habits. Rather, such factors, allow for greater identification with the minority group for strategic personal benefit. Thus while theories of minority influence focus on the latent, subtle and delayed changes effected on majority groups (Mugny, 1982); we suggest that in the case of Indians in the Caribbean, the influences accorded by their economic and political statuses are insidious deterrent to the pressures to change.

In summary, literature suggests that there are several differences in the structural arrangements of the Indo-Guyanese family when compared to the Afro-Guyanese. Past studies do not establish with clarity if there is more cultural continuity or assimilation among the Indo-Guyanese. In this paper we provide an empirical assessment of the cultural persistence of the Indian marriage and family patterns in Guyana, despite the fact that those of the Indian heritage are considered a minority in the Caribbean. However, as
we observed earlier, this analysis has important implications for the process of assimilation in that in Guyana, Indians constitute the majority of the population.

**METHODS**

*Data Collection*

Cross-sectional data from Guyana collected in 2004 was used for this study. A three-stage random probability sampling procedure facilitated by the Guyana Bureau of Statistics resulted in a sample of 948 respondents. Utilizing information from the 2002 census, for the urban sample, minor areas (tracts) were selected at the first stage, enumeration districts (blocks) at the second, and households at the final stage. In rural areas, villages were selected at the first stage. The cluster of villages along the east and west coasts of a major county were listed and a number of villages were selected based on a probability proportionate to size procedure. Complete listing of lots and dwelling units were made available by local municipalities. These records were used to select house lots at the second stage of sampling. The records of land ownership are arranged by “lot” and on these, in most cases are multiple households sometimes distinguished alphabetically. In other cases, we developed alphabetical distinction since the number of houses of each lot was always known. In the final stage, households were selected. The interviewee at each household for both the urban and rural samples, was a head of household or spouse predetermined by a random process and indicated on the instrument. For a select 100 families, both the head and partner were interviewed. Data was collected over a 4-week period by 20 trained field workers using face-to-face interviews.
Sample
A total of 948 surveys were completed achieving a 92% response rate. The sample consisted of 615 women and the age of the respondents ranged from 19-92 years, with an average of 45.5 years. Nearly 29% of the sample consisted of Indo-Guyanese while the majority of the respondents were Afro-Guyanese (53.8%), about 15% were Mixed-Guyanese and the remaining were of other races (Amerindian, Chinese, and Portuguese). The overall population composition of the sample was not representative of the national population distribution, because of the sampling techniques used for this study. The urban sample is representative of the urban population in Guyana and mirrors the census population distribution within a 3% margin of error. The rural sample, however, is represented only of Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese living along one of the coastal regions of the country. In rural-Guyana, there are several ethnic villages, however only three Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese villages were selected as part of the rural sample for this study.

Nearly 66% of the Indo-Guyanese in this sample lived in urban areas, while 88% of the other racial groups lived in urban areas. The average age of the Indo-Guyanese was 44.7 years and they had completed an average schooling of 8 years. Majority of the Mixed–Guyanese consist of the “douglas” - the Guyanese term for interracial unions of Afro- and Indo-Guyanese. This group is of interest to the study, as they in principle represent the well-acculturated Guyanese. By comparing the behavior patterns of the mixed group with the ‘pure’ groups, it was examined if certain ethnic patterns tend to be dominant in interracial unions.
Hypotheses

Four specific hypotheses were developed based on the review of literature to answer the underlying research question: given that the Indo-Guyanese are a majority in the Guyanese context, but a minority in the Caribbean context, do they differ from the dominant culture of the Caribbean? These hypotheses are as follows:

(1) Indo-Guyanese are more likely than other racial groups to define “family” as extended.

(2) Significantly greater proportion of Indo-Guyanese would be married than Afro- or Mixed-Guyanese.

(3) Indo-Guyanese are expected to have lower rates of cohabitation when compared to the Afro- or Mixed-Guyanese.

(4) It is expected that the Indo-Guyanese would have significantly longer age-adjusted duration of marriage when compared to other Guyanese.

Definition of family, marital status, and duration of marriage were the dependent variables used in the analysis while race was the independent variable. We first present descriptive information and then use bivariate and multivariate statistical analyses to test the hypotheses.

FINDINGS

Meaning of family

The word ‘family’ can have varied meanings in different cultural contexts and literature suggests that Indians have traditionally adhered to the extended family system (Barrow, 1999; Jayawardena, 1962). But literature also suggests that extended families are decreasing in popularity among the present day Indians in the Caribbean, especially among the urban dwellers of Guyana who are more creolized, than the rural Indo-Guyanese (Jayawardena, 1968; Sharma, 1986). However, it is also argued that even if
the Indo-Guyanese in the urban context may not have close proximity to their extended family, they still maintain a sense of community and obligation to help each (D’Cruz, & Bharat, 2001; Munasinghe, 2001). Accordingly we expected to find differences in the definition of the family, that could be attributed to race.

The respondents were asked to identify the persons they think about when they hear the word “family.” Their responses to the open-ended question were then coded to represent four major family types: nuclear, nuclear extended, nuclear with fictive kin and consanguineal based on the descriptions of family types in the literature (Clarke, 1957; Smith, 1962). Nuclear family consists of one or two parents living with their children (natural or adopted). Nuclear extended family is similar to the nuclear family except that it is extended by the presence of relatives or other persons in the family. Nuclear with fictive kin refers to nuclear families that have fictive kin live with them in their home. Fictive kin refers to individuals who are unrelated by either birth or marriage, but are in an emotionally significant relationship with the characteristics of a family relationship. Consanguineal families refer to families where blood relatives (brothers and sisters) live together in a shared living space. Similar definitions of family types were cited in past studies on Guyanese families (Samuel, 2006; Wilson, 1989).

Table 1 indicates that the nuclear family is the most popular definition of the family for all three racial groups. However, contrary to expectations, Indo-Guyanese were more likely than the Afro- and Mixed-Guyanese to describe the family to be “nuclear” and less likely to embrace the “extended” definition of family. Almost 65% of the Indo-Guyanese as compared to nearly 53% of the other racial groups defined the family to be nuclear in nature. By contrast, while only 24% of Indo-Guyanese defined the
family as “extended” more than a third of Afro-Guyanese (36.4%) and Mixed-Guyanese (37.9%) did.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Regional comparison of how the family is defined is even more revealing. While the definitions of family types are less dissimilar in the urban area, there are marked differences in the rural areas. Rural Indo-Guyanese are 1.8 times more likely to define family as nuclear as are other groups and almost 28 times less likely to define it as extended. The data also revealed that the nuclear plus fictive kin type of family was nearly absent in the rural sample for all race groups (Table 1). This may be due to the fact that housing is difficult to acquire in urban areas, which forces people to share housing. In Guyana, people move to urban areas for the purpose of work and education and hence they may at least have to temporarily share homes with others.

These findings also suggest that the persons of Indian origin in Guyana are more likely to think of the family as nuclear rather than extended, although the traditional Indian culture idealizes the joint family, a type of the extended family (Jayawardena, 1962; Uberoi, 1993). Majority of all of the respondents, irrespective of race defined the family to be nuclear rather than extended. While this restricted definition of family is pervasive, it does not accord with the reality that extended families are more common in the Caribbean at large. According to Samuel (2006) urbanization effects could explain the change in definition of the family from extended to nuclear, based on the results of a study on an urban sample of Guyana in 1987.

In this study, we find evidence of a convergence of shared definitions of family types in urban Guyana, but no evidence that Indo-Guyanese in rural areas are likely to
conceive of family in “extended” terms (Table 1). In fact the rural Indo-Guyanese provided an overwhelmingly “nuclear” definition of the family. One plausible explanation for this difference is the fact that rural Indo-Guyanese tend to be more affluent than the rural Afro-Guyanese, hence can afford their own homes. Many rural Indo-Guyanese are rice farmers and they tend to live together as families in their individual houses, but in close proximity to the paternal family. On the other hand the not-so-affluent Afro-Guyanese males often migrate to urban areas in search of employment, leaving behind their wives and children who have to move into extended families. Another explanation for the perception of family as “extended” among the rural Afro-Guyanese is the higher prevalence of matrifocal households among Afro-Guyanese, due to higher rates of visiting and common law unions. Single mothers with their children often choose to move into the maternal home for practical reasons, thus increasing the rate of extended families. Indo-Guyanese on the other hand with a high rate of marriage and a low rate of cohabitation tend to have a higher chance of living in nuclear families with the father being present. We suggest that these structural realities influence the way the family is defined.

Overall more Indo-Guyanese describe the family to be nuclear than extended, the difference being large in rural areas. It must also be noted that the notion of the Indo-Caribbean nuclear family is not similar to the Western notion of an isolated unit but is intimately linked to a wider group of kin (Ally, 1990; Jayawardena, 1962). One of the reasons for this overwhelming dominance of the definition of the nuclear family among the rural Indo-Guyanese could be explained by the fact that the Indo-Caribbean extended family has been described in literature to be a conglomeration of nuclear families living
in close proximity to the parents and siblings of the husband (Nettles, 1995; Smith, 1959). Methodological limitations of this study do not allow the researcher to understand further nuances in the definition of the family.

*Structural arrangements of marriage*

Literature suggests that marriage is the ideal form of union in the Caribbean at large and it is more common among the Indo-Guyanese than the Afro-Guyanese (Ellis, 1986; Sharma, 1986; Smith 1959). Hence it was hypothesized that a greater proportion of Indo-Guyanese would be married than the Afro- and Mixed-Guyanese. With an increase in Creolization, it is suspected that marriages rates will decrease among the Indo-Guyanese.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

It was found that the majority of the Indo-Guyanese respondents (67%) were married, while only 37% of the Afro-Guyanese and 39% of the Mixed-Guyanese were married (Table 2). Only 10% of the Indo-Guyanese were found to be cohabiting, while it was true of about 20% of the Afro-Guyanese. This is consistent with extant literature that marriage is still the most popular union among the Indo-Guyanese.

The rate of separation in marriage was least for the Indo-Guyanese (2.6 %) and highest for the Afro-Guyanese (5.9%). The Indo-Guyanese reported the lowest divorce rate (2%) while the Mixed-Guyanese reported the highest rate (9.8%). The national rate of separation and divorce is about 2% for both males and females according to Caribbean Community (CARICOM) statistics report of 2003. The data suggests that the Indo-Guyanese are more likely to endure and make their relationships last, when compared to
the Afro-Guyanese. This is consistent with extant literature on Indian families, that Indian marriages have great stability.

**Marital status by race and age**

The relationship between race and marital status was elaborated using the age grouping: below 45 years and 45 years and above. The results revealed that age had a small, but significant effect on the relationship between race and marital status (Table 3). Irrespective of age, Indo-Guyanese had higher rates of marriage than other racial groups. However, while there were 38% more marriages among Indo-Guyanese for respondents under 45 years of age, the disparity was reduced to 18% for those 45 years and older. Some of this is explained by the change of cohabitation rates for the non-Indian population. As evident from Table 3, the younger Indo-Guyanese reported a 5% higher rate of cohabitation than the older Indo-Guyanese, but there was a 25% difference for the others. This is consistent with literature indicating that Afro-Caribbean marriages gradually transition from consensual unions to legal marriages unlike Indian marriages which transition into a tolerance of extra-marital relationships (Agrosino, 1976). The higher rate of cohabitation among the younger Indo-Guyanese is supported by literature suggesting that the younger people are more creolized (Smith & Jaywardena, 1959).

When compared by age, the Indo-Guyanese report a lower rate of separation and divorce when compared to the others. The rate of those widowed was higher among the older respondents of all racial groups. Irrespective of age the Indo-Guyanese reported higher rates of widowhood. This, in part, is explained by the higher rates of marriage and perhaps by the fact that widow remarriage is not encouraged in the traditional Hindu culture. Only 4% of the older Indo-Guyanese reported to have never been married,
whereas about 20% of the other racial groups had never married. With increase in age the probability of being married for the Indo-Guyanese increased significantly.

In summary, the younger and older Indo-Guyanese had statistically significant differences in their marital status when compared to the other groups as indicated by the significant Pearson Chi-square values \( \chi^2 = 28.69 \) (Indo-Guyanese); \( \chi^2 = 95.98 \) (Others); \( p<0.01 \), degrees of freedom=5]. The relationship between race and marital status was significant but weak as measured by Cramer’s V was 0.32 (Indo-Guyanese) and 0.39 (Others) with a probability of <0.01. Race did have a statistically significant influence on marital status, even when age was held constant.

Marital status by race and place of residence (rural/ urban)

Marital status was also analyzed by the region, to determine if there were urban/ rural differences. Results in Table 3 indicate that, overall, the rural Guyanese reported a higher rate of marriage and lower rates of divorce when compared to the urban Guyanese. The rural Indo-Guyanese reported a lower rate of separation and widowhood when compared to the urban Indo-Guyanese, while for the other race groups the rural/ urban rates of separation and widowhood were similar. Rural/ urban cohabitation rates of the Guyanese when compared by race present an interesting pattern. There was a 10% decrease in cohabitation rate for the rural Indo-Guyanese when compared to their urban counterparts, but there was a 14% increase for the other racial rural respondents. These findings support the notion that the rural Indo-Guyanese give more importance to marriage than the more creolized urban Indo-Guyanese. The urban Indo-Guyanese when compared to the rural Indo-Guyanese reported a 20% decrease in rate of marriage and a
10% increase in rate of cohabitation which is supported by literature that suggests that the urban Indo-Guyanese becoming more creolized (Smith & Jayawardena, 1959).

**Duration of marriage**

The duration of the marriage/relationship is often used as a measure of stability of marriage/relationship in literature (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). The Indo-Guyanese reported being married for an average of 17 years (SD =12.3; Min-Max=1-45 years), followed by the Mixed-Guyanese with an average of 15 years and the Afro-Guyanese with about 13 years. Statistical tests indicated that these averages differences were significant ($F_{2, 673} = 4.9$, $p<0.01$) and the post hoc test results revealed that much of the overall significance is attributable to the difference between the Indo- and Afro-Guyanese. Statistically, the mean years of marriage Indo-Guyanese and Mixed-Guyanese are essentially similar.

We then fitted a General Linear Model (GLM) to further assess the differences in duration of marriage by racial groups controlling for the effects of age. Overall, the univariate GLM model fitted the data well explaining approximately 55% of the variance in duration of marriage. The age-adjusted effect of racial groups was significant. Similar to the ANOVA model, however the significant difference was between the Indo- and Afro Guyanese, with the Indo-Guyanese having 4.2 years longer age-adjusted mean years of marriage than Afro-Guyanese. Whereas the age-adjusted mean duration of marriage of the Mixed-Guyanese was 2.5 years longer than Afro-Guyanese, the difference did not reach statistical significance. Overall, the racial difference accounted for about 5% of the variance explained. We illustrate these differences in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]
DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Caribbean family studies document that a broad range of complex family types exist throughout the region (Smith 1962, Clarke, 1957). Much has been written about how the definition of the family in traditional societies differs from the westernized societies. The ideal Indian family is often described as the patrilenial extended family, which implies that children, whether married or unmarried continue to live with their parents and married/ unmarried siblings. The joint family by definition and function requires sharing of property and joint landownership (Madan, 1963), that was not possible in the plantation life style and indentureship, which led to the weakening of the ideal form of the Indian family. It is rare to find traditional joint families in the urban context, but extended families are relatively more common both in urban India (Chekki, 1974) and in the Indo-Caribbean community.

Our data indicated that the Indo-Guyanese were more likely to describe the family to be nuclear, rather than extended. This is consistent with the reality that the nuclear family is the modal form of family arrangement in the Caribbean, although varied forms of the family exist throughout the region (Wilson, Williams & Wilkins, 1992). Given that extended families are viewed the ideal type in the Indian culture, nationally and internationally (Jayawardena, 1968), this finding may suggest a movement of Indo-Guyanese away from traditional Indian understanding of family forms, to a more westernized notion of what “family” means. This case is probably stronger in that respondents were not subjected to the constraints of preset categories or structural definitions of the family. Rather, the open-ended question about the meaning of family allowed for respondents’ own interpretations of what family means to them.
D’Cruz, & Bharat (2001) argue that even the most modern nuclear families have a strong sense of *jointness*. The possibility exists that such nuances in the definition of the family are difficult to measure in a structured interview. If a qualitative methodology was used to study how the Indo-Guyanese think of the family the findings may have resulted in a clearer understanding of the complexity of what the term means. Because of the element of qualitative latitude in the question as asked in the survey, we suggest that the shift to an extended definition of family is indeed the reality for the population we studied.

Analysis of the structural arrangements of the marriage revealed that the Indo-Guyanese in comparison to the other groups had longer duration of marriages. The significantly greater duration of marriage and low rates of divorce and separation suggest greater stability of Indo-Guyanese marriages. These differences persisted when the effect of age was adjusted. This is consistent with literature that Indian families are known for their resilience and strength. One explanation for the high stability of Indo-Guyanese marriages is perhaps due to the persistence of traditional familial values and beliefs among the present-day Indo-Guyanese (Samuel, & Wilson, in press). In the traditional Indian family group identity and cohesiveness are valued over self identity and self-expression, which could contribute to marital stability (Medora, et. al, 2000).

A smaller number of Indo-Guyanese reported that they were never married, when compared to the Afro-Guyanese and Mixed-Guyanese. It was also found that the Indo-Guyanese had low rates of cohabitation when compared to the Afro-Guyanese and Mixed-Guyanese. This supports the literature that suggests that the rate of marriage is much higher among the Indo-Caribbean communities (CARICOM secretariat, 2003;
Assimilation and the Indo-Guyanese family

Sharma, 1986). According to census data of 1990/91, more than half of the population over 15 years in the CARICOM was never married except in Guyana and Trinidad which have large numbers of people of Indian ancestry. In the traditional Hindu Indian culture, marriage is not just important, but inevitable as it is viewed as a stage of life that marks the transition to adulthood. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the effects of urbanization and Creolization do not seem to have influenced the pattern of high marriage rates among the Indo-Guyanese.

**Assimilation or Cultural Pluralism?**

The Indo-Guyanese in this study defined the family to be nuclear rather than extended which may imply some degree of cultural discontinuity. The literature is clear that the Hindu Indian (majority of Indo-Guyanese are Hindus) ideal is the extended family. However, after nearly 150 years of living in the Caribbean, the Indo-Guyanese tend to define the family to be “nuclear” rather than “extended.” Nonetheless, it cannot be argued that this shift in definition from extended to nuclear families is the result of assimilation, because of the prevalence of extended families among the dominant Creole culture. Rather, it may be considered a cultural adaptation rooted in the reality of the structural arrangements of Indo-Guyanese families in Guyana. This is consistent with the past findings that nuclear households are more common than extended households among the Indian communities in Canada, Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam and Sri Lanka, (Jayawardena, 1968; Srivastava, 1974).

The differences in the structural arrangements of Indo-Guyanese families, on the other hand, may be suggestive of cultural continuity. Indo-Guyanese were found to have
longer and more stable marriages when compared to the Afro and Mixed-Guyanese. It appears that even after more than a century of living in the Caribbean, where the familial norms are very different from conservative eastern standards, the Indo-Guyanese still hold on to the tradition of stable marriages and have undergone limited “Guyanization” in the familial realm. The Indo-Guyanese remain culturally distinct on the structural level of the family consistent with the socio-cultural values brought by early immigrants from India, several generations ago (Pitsch, 1999). The Indo-Guyanese of this study have not assimilated into the dominant Creole ways of the family. Applying Park & Burgess’ definition of assimilation, Indo-Guyanese seem to have resisted the interpenetration of the dominant Caribbean sentiments and attitudes as it relates to the family (Alba & Nee 1997) and thus maintain their racial and ethnic distinctiveness. The economic status of the Indians in the Caribbean, and their political power in Guyana could be the factors deterring change and instead fostering a greater identification with the minority group for strategic personal benefit. Despite their minority status in the Caribbean the Indo-Guyanese, they have not been forced into assimilation and dependency because of asymmetry in status relative to the majority group. They instead have resisted change, which in this study is measured by the clear differences in the structural arrangements of the family.

In conclusion it can be said that the Indo-Guyanese appear to be distinctly different from the dominant cultural group: the Afro-Guyanese, as three of the four hypotheses were found to be statistically significant. Majority of the Indo-Guyanese like the Afro-Guyanese defined the family to be nuclear rather than extended. There were significant differences between them in the marital status and duration of marriage even when the effect of age was held constant. The majority of the Indo-Guyanese,
irrespective of age reported that they were married and they reported low rates of cohabitation, separation, and divorce. The significant differences in the structural arrangements of the family suggest that there is some degree of cultural continuity among the present day Indo-Guyanese. Extant literature (Barrow, 1999; Roopnarine & Brown, 1997), past studies (Samuel, 2006; Samuel & Wilson, 2007) and findings from this paper suggest that the Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese exist as two separate sub-societies in Guyana, with a certain amount of ongoing interpenetration and fusion. This process of assimilation is an ongoing process rather than completed, and hence there is ethnic and cultural heterogeneity in Guyana, suggestive of the traits of cultural pluralism (Gordon, 1964).
REFERENCES


Assimilation and the Indo-Guyanese family


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Table 1: Meaning of Family by Race & Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>RACE</th>
<th>REGION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indo-G $N=192$</td>
<td>Afro-G $N=338$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fictive Kin</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consanguineal</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: Marital status by race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Indo-G ($N=271$)</th>
<th>Afro-G ($N=506$)</th>
<th>Mixed-G ($N=163$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Marital status by age, region and race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>REGION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below 45 yrs</td>
<td>45 yrs &amp; above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>IG 72.5%</td>
<td>Others 34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Comparing mean duration of marriage by race
ENDNOTES

i The process by which various ethnic groups acculturate into the dominant Afro-Caribbean ‘Creole’ culture of the Caribbean.

ii A feudalistic arrangement consisting of the actual land owners or jagamans (high class members) and workers or kamins (lower caste members) who served them.

iii A council of elected members taking decisions on issues key to a village's social, economic and cultural life. It evolved in ancient India and is one of the oldest democratic systems still used.

iv Human investigations committee approval was obtained through the Institutional review board of Wayne State University for use of the data.

v The cultural unification process of Guyana whose official motto is “One nation, One people, One destiny”