

New Perspective in the Study of Urban Family:
Personal Network Approach

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The purposes of this study are to reexamine the problems in some typical family models and their modifications in the past studies of family in an industrialized urban society, and to present the personal network approach as an alternative perspective.

The family models implied by the theories of Wirth (urbanism) and Parsons (isolated nuclear family) and their modifications by empirical studies (rediscovery of urban families and primary groups; modified extended family) are critically reviewed. 'Modern family' model in historical sociology and modern man's identity model characterized as 'homelessness' are also discussed in relation to the previous sociological modelings.

Some basic problems and contradicting propositions in these studies are reinterpreted and theoretically reconstructed in the light of city/personal life relation by Fischer as subcultural theory. Theoretical assumptions on, and application of personal network approach to, the specification of urban impact on personal social life in his studies are also pertinent to the study of family in urban context.

In conjunction with the significant implications in Bott's study on the relation between family life variations and social network patterns, the personal network approach to the urban family makes a potential contribution to the recent discussions on contemporary family changes, such as the family lifestyle differentiation and the individualization of family. Some suggestions for future research are also made particularly from the position to see city as a place of the proliferation of various subcultures and the differentiation of identities through selective commitment to these subcultures.