Parenting dynamics in working families and their influence on adolescent behavior in Surabaya

Jesica Gita Marcela [a*], Ahmad Ridwan [a]

[a] Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia
* Corresponding Author: jesica.23106@mhs.unesa.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study examined the dynamics of parenting in working households and its effects on teenage behavior in Surabaya. In families where both parents worked, parenting techniques faced distinct challenges that influenced teenagers' emotional intimacy and character formation. Using a qualitative phenomenological method, data were collected through comprehensive interviews and non-participant observation of teenagers aged 16 to 19 years. The findings revealed that when parents had limited time, it became more difficult for teenagers to express their feelings, leading them either to keep problems to themselves or seek support from friends. However, this condition also fostered independence, a sense of responsibility, and greater social awareness. An analysis based on George Herbert Mead's role theory suggested that adolescents often assumed parental responsibilities within the household, which facilitated identity formation but potentially reduced emotional warmth and familial engagement.

1. Introduction

The family is the smallest and most fundamental institution in human life, serving as the primary environment where individuals acquire essential skills such as eating, drinking, walking, and speaking, and develop moral values that shape a healthy personality. Children's socialization is inextricably linked to their initial interactions within a social group, which serves as a foundational element in their development [1]. Identity formation begins within the family, and both positive and negative aspects of family structure, as well as the broader social environment, have a significant influence on a child's personality development. Harmony within the family plays a crucial role in fostering resilience [2].

Parents often adjust their communication styles at home to align with their children's evolving personalities. It is their responsibility to adopt appropriate parenting approaches, as attitudes and emotions are influenced by both verbal and nonverbal communication [3]. This is supported by prior research [4] the subjective well-being of adolescents is significantly influenced by the levels of social support they receive and the quality of their interactions with their mothers. Therefore, it is imperative for parents, especially those who are employed full-time, to prioritize providing consistent social support and cultivating strong, nurturing relationships with their children. These efforts are essential to fostering positive developmental outcomes during adolescence.

Socioeconomic changes in the modern era have introduced new dynamics to family structures across Indonesia, particularly in large cities like Surabaya. Increasing living costs and growing

economic demands have compelled both parents to work, resulting in a shift away from traditional childcare patterns. In Surabaya, there are 1,569,714 residents aged 15 years and older who are employed, with an open unemployment rate of 6.76% and a formal sector employment rate of 63.85% [5]. The emergence of "dual-earner families" characterized by both parents participating in the workforce has become increasingly prevalent in urban contexts. This trend has a significant impact on parenting styles and the developmental trajectories of adolescents.

Communication within the family plays a central role in transmitting values, emotions, and expectations, thereby strengthening bonds and guiding behavior. Communication is a dynamic, ongoing process in which messages are created, delivered, and met with feedback, forming a continuous cycle. Kurniadi emphasizes that effective family communication fosters strong bonds and mutual reliance among members, making it essential for character development. Parents are therefore responsible for leading, supervising, and guiding their children's growth through constructive communication [6].

Surabaya, Indonesia's second-largest city and the industrial hub of East Java, has experienced a significant rise in families where both parents are employed. According to BPS data (August 2024), the city's labor force reached 1.62 million people, marking an increase of 55,100 from the previous year [7]. This trend poses significant challenges for childcare, particularly during adolescence—a pivotal stage for identity formation and character development. Parenting and communication patterns in dual-earner families often differ from those in households where one parent remains at home. A paucity of time allotted for parental interaction has been demonstrated to engender a diminution in the quality of relationships and to impede the transmission of family values [8]. In many cases, caregiving responsibilities are transferred to other family members, such as grandparents, siblings, or household assistants [9]. These dynamics have significant implications for adolescents' psychosocial development, particularly in shaping their behavior.

George Herbert Mead's Role Theory offers a relevant conceptual framework for understanding this phenomenon, as it examines how individuals adopt specific roles in social interactions and how these roles shape self-concept [10]. The objective of this study is to address the existing knowledge gap by exploring the dynamics of parenting in working families in Surabaya and their implications for adolescent behavior. The objective of this research is to inform adaptive parenting strategies that can optimize adolescent development amid inevitable changes in family structures in modern urban society. A comprehensive literature review was conducted over the past decade to enhance the study's foundation and refine the research focus.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to investigate the dynamics of parenting in dual-earner families and their influence on adolescent behavior in Surabaya. The phenomenological approach was selected for its ability to capture participants lived experiences and provide an in-depth understanding of the underlying factors that shape adolescent behavior and personality development. Data were collected using three complementary techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with adolescents from working families to explore their perspectives and experiences.

Second, non-participant observations were conducted without direct researcher involvement to capture the contextual dynamics of adolescent behavior within both home and school environments. These observations were carried out five times over three weeks, focusing on adolescents aged 16–19 years. Particular attention was given to their emotional expressions, independence in daily routines, and interactions with siblings or other caregivers. Third, a literature review was undertaken to strengthen the conceptual foundation of the study, with emphasis on family communication,

parenting patterns in dual-earner families, adolescent behavior, and role theory. Relevant literature was accessed through academic databases, including Google Scholar, DOAJ, and ScienceDirect.

In addition to primary data, secondary data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) were used to provide context on the prevalence of working parents in Surabaya and other major cities in Indonesia. This data included statistics on urban family structures, labor force participation rates, and gender-based employment patterns. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling based on three inclusion criteria: (1) adolescents aged 16–19 years (identified as M19 for males and A19 for females) living with working parents, (2) a willingness to share their experiences, and (3) residency in Surabaya. George Herbert Mead's Role Theory was applied as the conceptual framework, offering analytical insight into how changing family roles impact harmony and emotional closeness between parents and children.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Adolescents' Emotional Closeness with Parents in Working Families

The findings from the interviews indicate that adolescents from working-class families frequently encounter difficulties in establishing emotional intimacy with their parents. This diminished closeness is largely attributed to the infrequent interactions between parents and children, as parents' work obligations often occupy a substantial portion of their time, starting from the early developmental stages of their children. One participant articulated this concern, highlighting the impact of work commitments on familial relationships: *"Since I was little, I was raised by my aunt because my mom and dad worked"* (M19). Another participant shared a similar experience: *"My mom and dad worked at a small phone shop from morning until night, so I took care of my younger siblings"* (A19).

The majority of informants reported that their parents' working hours, which often extend from early morning until late evening, restrict communication to functional and technical matters, rather than emotional exchanges. As one adolescent explained, *"My parents work in Surabaya, so they come home on Saturdays"* (M19).

Several participants also noted that many parental roles during their childhood were delegated to other parties, such as grandparents, older siblings, or paid caregivers. This type of substituted parenting tends to involve less emotional engagement, with parents rarely spending meaningful time with their children. In some cases, the primary emotional role was assumed by another family member or caregiver, while in others, it was largely absent.

Formation of Adolescent Independence

The limited communication and attention from parents were found to have a significant influence on adolescent character development. Based on the data, most informants reported developing a strong sense of independence, becoming accustomed to solving problems independently, managing their time effectively, and making decisions without substantial parental input. As one participant explained, *"It depends on the issue. For example, I rarely talk about personal issues"* (A19). Another noted, *"Not really, I'm rarely at home. When I'm not at home, I never communicate via cell phone (chat)"* (A19).

Several adolescents also assumed parental responsibilities within the household, such as caring for younger siblings, managing household chores, and serving as confidants for other family members. One informant described, *"It depends. If I'm at home and not doing anything, then I clean the house. I have a younger sibling, so sometimes we take turns"* (A19).

As they grew older, informants observed a decline in shared family activities. Moments such as eating together, going on vacations, or engaging in casual conversations became increasingly rare. Instead, adolescents began to cultivate social networks outside the home, engaging more with peers and participating in extracurricular or organizational activities. As one remarked, *"I rarely go out with my family; I usually go out with my friends"* (A19). Another reflected on the emotional consequences: *"Because I rarely see my parents, I feel very distant from them"* (M19).

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that the pressures experienced by working families can catalyze the accelerated development of social roles in adolescents. In several cases, adolescents demonstrated a heightened awareness of the family's economic burden and actively sought to avoid adding to their parents' stress, both emotionally and financially [11]. This circumstance often creates a psychological distance between parents and children, making it difficult for adolescents to open up or share their feelings. When faced with personal challenges, they tend to remain silent, internalize their problems, or confide only in close friends whom they perceive as more understanding [12].

These findings can be interpreted through George Herbert Mead's Role Theory, which posits that individual identity is shaped through social interaction and role-taking. In the context of working families, adolescents often assume roles that are ideally fulfilled by parents, such as caregiving, decision-making, or providing emotional support to other family members [13]. This role-taking process fosters the early development of a mature social identity as a response to a demanding environment [14].

The accelerated role formation observed among these adolescents also illustrates how self-identity is constructed within complex social contexts [15]. They learn to view themselves from the perspective of others, a concept Mead describes as the "generalized other," and adjust their behavior accordingly to meet prevailing social expectations within the family setting. While this contributes to the development of independence and adaptability, it often comes at the cost of reduced emotional interaction with parents [16]. Such changes reflect shifting dynamics in working family relationships, where parent–child connections are influenced not only by age but also by time constraints and increasingly demanding work patterns [17].

In societies where individualism is more pronounced, such as in parts of Indonesia, the emotional absence of parents may have a more substantial negative impact compared to cultures that strongly uphold family values and togetherness [18]. Although communication technologies such as text messaging and video calls can help bridge physical distance, they cannot replace direct emotional interaction [19]. Without sufficient emotional support, adolescents may face heightened risks of psychological distress, including anxiety, social isolation, and emotional instability [20]. Therefore, creating an environment that supports both independence and emotional well-being in adolescents requires collaboration between families, schools, and the wider community.

4. Conclusion

This study reveals that the dynamics of working families have a substantial influence on adolescents' social and emotional development. Limited parental interaction, driven by demanding work schedules, often creates psychological distance, reducing emotional closeness and making adolescents more reluctant to share personal problems. At the same time, these conditions promote independence, as many adolescents assume caregiving duties, contribute to household decisions, and provide support to other family members.

Three central patterns emerged: reduced emotional interaction due to time constraints, the delegation of caregiving roles to others, and the accelerated development of independence.

Adolescents adapt by assuming roles traditionally held by parents, thereby shaping their social identities earlier than expected. While this fosters maturity and adaptability, inadequate emotional support risks weakening family bonds.

In the Indonesian cultural context, where strong family relationships are highly valued, the absence of parental emotional presence may have amplified effects. Collaboration among families, schools, and communities is therefore essential to ensure balanced adolescent development. Strengthening family communication, providing emotional guidance, and creating supportive community programs are recommended to sustain both independence and emotional well-being in adolescents.

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Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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