

Intergenerational Communication: Parental Strategies in Guiding Their Children's Households

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Abstract: This study aims to explore intergenerational communication strategies applied by parents in nurturing their children's households after marriage, particularly within the collectivist cultural context of Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, this research was conducted in Jennetallasa Village, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, a region known for upholding strong familial values. Six parents and two children from young couples were selected as informants through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, then analysed using a descriptive phenomenological approach. The findings show that parents tend to adopt communication strategies that are flexible, empathetic, and adaptive, such as waiting for the right moment to speak, avoiding confrontational approaches, utilising digital media, and building dialogic and equal relationships with their children and in-laws. These strategies reflect a shift in the parental role from authoritative to emotional companion, who respects the autonomy of the younger generation. The findings enrich the study of family communication by adding a post-marriage perspective and expanding the application of the Family Communication Patterns (FCP) theory in local cultural contexts. This research also provides practical contributions for parents and family counsellors in developing harmonious and adaptive communication amid the dynamics of modern household life.

Keywords: *intergenerational communication; communication strategy; parent-child relationship; family communication*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesian society, the family functions not only as the smallest social unit but also as a value-bearing institution that plays a crucial role in shaping and maintaining the order of its members' lives (Lubis et al., 2021; Santika, 2020). One of the most enduring familial roles is the involvement of parents in their children's households (Syahjuan et al., 2022), even after marriage. Within a collectivist culture, such involvement is often interpreted as an expression of love, moral responsibility, and religious duty. Parents frequently offer advice, guidance, and even intervention to help sustain their children's marital stability. However, amid social changes and rising awareness of young couples' autonomy, this involvement may lead to intergenerational tension if not supported by healthy and strategic communication.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of interpersonal communication in bridging parent-child relationships in the context of marriage. Research Pratiwi et al. (2021) shows that parental pressure for children to marry can trigger conflict, especially when the children are not psychologically or emotionally prepared. Yet, such conflict can be mitigated through open interpersonal communication and active listening, fostering mutual understanding and respect. Ludfi & Fina (2024) examined the dynamics of parental involvement in the households of patrilocal and matrilocal families, finding that parental support is expressed in both material and immaterial forms. While this can enhance family stability, it can also lead to conflict, especially when it clashes with the couple's autonomy, gender roles, and cultural norms.

At the same time, intergenerational communication has also received attention in preventing early marriage. In many cases, the decision to marry young is influenced not only by internal factors such as affection or personal desire but also by the lack of dialogic relationships between children and parents. Research by Arnanda et al. (2025) found that when interpersonal communication between parents and children is built on empathetic, educational, and open approaches, children tend to be more aware of the importance of education and emotional readiness before marriage. Such communication serves not only as a medium for exchanging information but also as a space for developing self-awareness, reinforcing values of responsibility and independence.

Furthermore, the findings emphasise that quality interpersonal communication can foster stronger emotional bonds between parents and children. In relationships built on trust and emotional warmth, children feel valued and are more open to parental views or advice. This type of relationship not only provides psychological safety but also encourages children to delay marriage decisions until they are mentally and socially prepared. Therefore, the quality of communication directly affects children's decision-making, especially regarding early marriage.

In line with these findings, Wardani et al. (2023) also identified that communication using a non-coercive approach, respectful language, and peer-like relationships fosters openness. Such non-authoritative strategies help children feel heard and understood, making them more receptive to parental perspectives. This supports the notion that humanistic communication strategies oriented towards equal relationships are more effective than traditional instructive approaches. Here, communication is not merely about the message content, but also about the manner and power dynamics embedded in intergenerational interactions.

Conversely, one-way communication patterns still found in some families risk creating communication gaps and emotional resistance from children. Hamidah et al. (2023) found that many parents still dominate conversations, delivering messages without allowing room for responses, criticism, or discussion. This linear pattern reflects an imbalanced relationship that tends to position children as passive recipients. As a result, children feel undervalued and may seek solutions beyond parental control, including rushing into marriage due to feelings of neglect or lack of support. Factors such as social pressure, unplanned pregnancy, financial instability, or dropping out of school often compound these decisions.

One relevant theoretical framework to understand these communication dynamics is the Family Communication Patterns (FCP) theory developed by McLeod and Chaffee (1972). This

theory posits that family communication operates along two central orientations: conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Conversation orientation refers to the degree to which families encourage open dialogue, the exchange of ideas, and emotional sharing among members. In contrast, conformity orientation emphasises hierarchical structures, obedience, and uniformity in beliefs and values (Waraseta Utami et al., 2023)

In the Indonesian collectivist context, family communication has traditionally leaned towards high conformity orientation, where parental authority dominates decision-making, including in marriage and post-marriage dynamics (Nuralim et al., 2024). However, social changes, exposure to global media, and the increasing emphasis on individual autonomy have prompted a shift. Families are gradually adopting more dialogic and flexible communication patterns, integrating elements of conversation orientation while still maintaining respect for hierarchical structures.

Despite the relevance of FCP, previous studies have largely applied this theory in pre-marital contexts, such as decision-making about marriage or career paths. There is a paucity of research exploring how FCP manifests in post-marital family dynamics, particularly in situations where parents continue to engage with their children's households. This study seeks to fill this theoretical gap by examining how parents negotiate their roles through communication strategies that balance guidance with respect for their children's marital autonomy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach using a phenomenological research design. This approach was chosen to explore deeply the subjective experiences of parents in applying intergenerational communication strategies to their married children. Phenomenology allows researchers to understand the meanings embedded in communication practices from the perspective of the individuals involved, rather than from external observation alone. The study was conducted in Jennetallasa Village, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi an area known for its strong kinship culture and traditional family values.

The research subjects were parents who had married children and who either lived with them or in close physical and social proximity, allowing for frequent communication. Informants were selected using purposive sampling with specific criteria, including being actively involved in post-marriage family interactions and having children who had been married for at least one year. The main informants consisted of six parents: Mother A, Father B, Mother C, Father D, Mother E, and Father F. These individuals came from diverse social backgrounds, age groups, and family life experiences, offering a range of perspectives. Additionally, two young adult children were included as supporting informants to provide insights from the second generation and ensure data validity through perspective triangulation.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews using semi-structured guidelines to allow informants to freely and narratively explore their experiences. The interviews were conducted in person at the informants' homes, lasting between 45 and 90 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Besides the interviews, the researcher also observed daily communicative interactions between parents and children and collected relevant

documentation, such as family records or private messages, to support the analysis of communication dynamics.

Data analysis followed the descriptive phenomenological approach as outlined by Moustakas. The process began with *epoché*, or the suspension of the researcher's personal biases, followed by *horizontalisation* to identify all relevant statements. These statements were then grouped into essential themes. A *textural description* was developed to describe what the informants experienced, followed by a *structural description* explaining how these experiences were formed within their social contexts. Ultimately, the researcher formulated the essence of intergenerational communication strategies used by parents in their children's post-marital households.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that intergenerational communication strategies employed by parents in supporting their children's households are flexible, adaptive, and contextual. Each informant demonstrated a different communication approach depending on the emotional situation, the character of the child, and the evolving family dynamics after marriage. Nevertheless, several consistent patterns emerged in these intergenerational communication practices.

Table 1. Interview Results Tabulation

Informant	Statement	Coding
Mother A	I don't want to interfere, but if they argue, I try to gently advise them not to get too emotional.	Non-confrontational approach; Emotional advice as intervention
Father B	Sometimes I feel the need to speak, especially when I see my child making a poor decision, but I wait for the right time.	Timing strategy; Role as advisor
Mother C	When there's a problem, I usually don't ask right away. I wait for my child to open up first. If she's open, then I step in.	Waiting for openness; Avoiding confrontation
Father D	I tell my child that marriage is about cooperation. Don't complain to the parents too often. But I still keep an eye on things.	Emphasis on couple autonomy; Indirect control
Mother E	I usually send messages via WhatsApp to ask how they're doing. From there, I can tell if something's wrong. Then I'll call if needed.	Digital communication; Indirect approach
Father F	I treat my son-in-law like a friend. If I'm too strict, they'll pull away. So I keep things relaxed and initiate discussions.	Persuasive approach; Egalitarian relationship

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

The findings of this study reveal that the intergenerational communication strategies employed by parents in supporting their children's households post-marriage are not merely practical tactics but represent deeper shifts in family values and role perceptions. These strategies such as non-confrontational advice, emotionally attuned timing, use of digital media, and the fostering of egalitarian relationships are reflections of parental attempts to balance tradition with the contemporary expectation of autonomy in marital life.

From the table above, it is evident that the communication strategies parents used to support their married children's households vary based on situation, emotion, and reflection. Each informant demonstrated a tendency to use non-dominant strategies, focusing instead on companionship and providing space for the child's independence.

Non-Confrontational Approaches to Maintain Harmony

The choice to use soft and indirect communication signifies a cultural preference for maintaining *rukun* (harmony) (Gede Agung et al., 2024; Rusli et al., 2024; Sabey et al., 2024; Swasono et al., 2025), a core value in Indonesian collectivist society. This strategy allows parents to offer guidance without overtly challenging their children's decision-making, which may prevent open conflict. However, this approach may inadvertently suppress the discussion of critical issues. By avoiding direct confrontation, parents risk leaving serious problems unaddressed, potentially allowing unresolved marital conflicts to fester. For example, Mother A's strategy of intervening only when absolutely necessary demonstrates parental restraint but may limit opportunities for proactive problem-solving. In the long term, this could lead to emotional distance or misinterpretation of silence as neglect.

Parents tend to employ gentle and indirect approaches when offering opinions or advice to their married children. They communicate calmly, avoid open arguments, and prioritise emotional guidance over verbal pressure. For instance, Mother A avoided directly involving herself in her child's marital conflicts unless absolutely necessary. She positioned herself as a calming presence during times of tension, offering advice gradually and without pressure. This approach aimed to maintain harmony without making the child feel controlled or blamed. It also reflects the evolving post-marriage parental role, shifting from authority figure to emotional support.

Emotionally Attuned Timing and Situational Adjustment

Waiting for the "right moment" reflects an empathetic sensitivity to the child's emotional state (Sabey et al., 2024). This strategy respects the younger generation's autonomy and creates space for self-expression. However, if not carefully managed, it can become a form of emotional delay or conflict avoidance. There is a risk that problems requiring timely intervention may be overlooked due to excessive caution, leading to delayed conflict resolution or emotional bottlenecks within the family system.

Timing is a critical part of parental communication strategies (Pariera & Turner, 2020). Parents wait for moments when their children are emotionally open or at ease, ensuring that the advice is received without resistance. This demonstrates emotional intelligence in managing intergenerational dialogue. Father B, for instance, emphasised that effective communication depends on choosing the right moment when the child is calm. Rather than confront the child directly, he waited for an appropriate time to express his concerns, thus avoiding rejection or conflict. Similarly, Mother C preferred to wait for her child to share voluntarily rather than initiate probing questions. She acted more as a listener, ready to help when asked. These strategies indicate empathy and respect for the child's emotional autonomy.

Recognition of Children's Autonomy Post-Marriage

Parents acknowledged their changed roles after their children married. Rather than interfering directly in household decisions, they remained emotionally present and supportive. Communication was used not to control but to nurture. Father D encouraged his child to resolve household issues independently, seeing this as part of learning and growing within marriage. However, he still monitored things from afar, offering emotional support as needed. This dual stance balances the advisory role with respect for the couple's privacy.

Digital Media as an Adaptive Communication Tool

Parents used digital platforms like WhatsApp to maintain emotional closeness without encroaching on their children's privacy. Digital communication served as a flexible, non-intrusive means to sustain relationships. Mother E, for example, preferred texting her child to check in, seeing this method as efficient and non-invasive. She didn't immediately call or raise serious issues, instead starting with casual chats that could lead to deeper conversations. This approach reflects adaptation to the younger generation's communication style and an effort to remain emotionally close without being physically or behaviourally overbearing.

The use of WhatsApp and other digital platforms indicates an adaptive response to technological change and younger generation preferences (Allil et al., 2024; Штепура, 2025). This method allows parents to maintain emotional contact without being physically intrusive. Nevertheless, digital communication may reduce the depth of emotional exchange, as text-based messages lack non-verbal cues such as tone, facial expressions, and body language. Misinterpretations can occur, and emotional nuances may be lost, leading to potential misunderstandings or a sense of emotional superficiality.

Building Equal and Dialogic Intergenerational Relationships

Some parents consciously fostered horizontal communication with their children and in-laws, positioning themselves as conversation partners rather than authority figures. This strategy created trust and openness for resolving marital issues. Father F avoided authoritative tones, choosing instead to communicate casually and amicably. He believed that by presenting himself as a discussion partner, his child and in-law were more open to talking and receiving advice. Relationships built on such equality were seen as more effective in maintaining household harmony by fostering mutual trust and comfort.

Positioning oneself as a "friend" rather than an authority figure fosters openness and mutual respect (Krulatz et al., 2018). Father F's approach of treating his son-in-law as a discussion partner promotes democratic communication. However, this may also blur generational boundaries, potentially leading to role confusion where the parental figure's influence diminishes. In cases where guidance is urgently needed such as in financial management or conflict resolution this overly horizontal dynamic may limit the parent's ability to assert necessary advice.

Dual Roles as Companions and Observers

Parents also acted in dual roles: as advisors when needed and as quiet observers monitoring the dynamics of their children's households (Yip et al., 2016). Gentle communication strategies helped balance their involvement with their children's independence. For example, Father D, although promoting his child's independence in problem-solving, still kept a watchful eye on their household situation. He remained available when needed but refrained from intervening unnecessarily. This demonstrated that intergenerational communication is not always verbal it can also be expressed through constant, albeit subtle, emotional presence.

Parents in this study adopted dual roles as emotional companions and discreet observers. While this duality allows for a flexible and sensitive response to family dynamics, it may also

create ambiguity. Parents may experience internal conflict between their desire to help and the cultural imperative to "let go," leading to emotional strain or guilt. Furthermore, children might perceive this watchful stance as passive control or covert surveillance, which could provoke resistance or withdrawal.

Communication as a Tool for Emotional Maintenance

Parental communication strategies went beyond advice-giving; they served as instruments for emotional bonding, value transmission, and long-term relational stability (Pope et al., 2020). Communication became a means of maintaining harmony without applying pressure or creating conflict. In general, intergenerational communication post-marriage was more than an information exchange it was a relational tool to nurture emotional closeness, build trust, and sustain family values. Parents showed a clear awareness of the need to maintain communication quality, even though they were no longer central figures in their children's married lives. Through soft, flexible, and adaptive strategies, communication ensured that family values continued to be passed down while giving children the space to grow and thrive independently.

The findings of this study reveal that the intergenerational communication strategies used by parents in guiding their children's post-marriage households reflect a hybridisation of communication orientations as proposed in the FCP model. Parents are not strictly applying either conversation or conformity patterns; instead, they are blending both in nuanced ways that respond to contemporary familial changes (Juliawati & Destiwati, 2022; Nurrahman & Khadijah, 2025). For example, the use of digital communication, non-confrontational advice, and dialogic relationships with in-laws illustrate a high conversation orientation, fostering openness and trust. At the same time, passive observation and indirect supervision reflect a symbolic conformity orientation, where parents maintain cultural expectations of familial responsibility without overt intervention. This suggests an adaptive reinterpretation of FCP, where traditional roles are re-negotiated to accommodate the emotional and social needs of younger generations. Moreover, the findings challenge the static application of FCP by showing that communication patterns are fluid and context-dependent, particularly in collectivist cultures undergoing social transition. Rather than fixed orientations, parents dynamically shift between conversation and conformity strategies based on emotional situations, technological mediation, and generational expectations. This contributes to the refinement of FCP by positioning it as a flexible framework that can evolve alongside societal and technological developments.

This study reveals that intergenerational communication between parents and their married children is conducted in a flexible, empathetic manner, adjusting to the changing context of family roles. Parents no longer place themselves at the centre of control but act as companions who maintain harmony through supportive communication strategies non-coercive, context-sensitive, and emotionally attuned. This aligns with the concept of Family Communication Patterns (FCP) developed by McLeod and Chaffee (1972), which argues that families gradually establish stable and distinctive communication climates based on two primary orientations: conversation and conformity (Waraseta Utami et al., 2023).

Informants such as Mother A and Father B exemplified high conversation orientation in their families. They refrained from direct reprimands or corrections, opting instead to wait for the right time, encourage their children's openness, and convey messages with a calming

tone. These families fostered open and participatory discussions that respected personal expression and emotional openness. As highlighted by Nuralim et al. (2024) family communication patterns significantly shape long-term thought frameworks, which influence individuals' broader social interactions.

In contrast, informants like Father D showed a moderate conformity orientation, balancing emotional support with symbolic control through passive observation. He encouraged his children to handle domestic issues independently while maintaining discreet oversight. This approach preserved family values without imposing them coercively. In such cases, communication functions as a medium for transmitting values and preserving continuity (Pudjiastuti et al., 2023; Purba et al., 2024), while respecting the decision-making autonomy of younger generations.

Moreover, informants such as Mother E demonstrated that digital communication could serve as an adaptive strategy. The use of WhatsApp and other online platforms has reshaped family communication climates, maintaining a conversational orientation even without face-to-face interaction. This highlights the dynamic nature of family communication, which evolves in tandem with technological shifts and generational preferences (Mikael Sinambela et al., 2025; Ridwan, 2024). In the FCP framework, this marks a transition in conversational practices from oral to digital text-based exchanges, which still carry elements of openness and emotional care.

Father F's narrative, wherein he positioned himself as a discussion partner rather than an authoritative figure, reflects a highly democratic family communication model. Relationships were built on equality and mutual trust rather than power. This clearly demonstrates high conversation and low conformity orientation a communication type that fosters idea exploration, conflict resolution through dialogue, and value negotiation rather than instruction. This model is believed to create long-lasting, stable intergenerational relationships, consistent with the findings of Manuputty et al. (2024; Supriatna et al., 2024) which emphasise the major influence of family communication patterns on how families process conflict, make decisions, and maintain emotional closeness among members.

Thus, the intergenerational communication strategies identified in this study reinforce the relevance of the FCP theory in the context of Indonesian families experiencing transitions in roles and values. Although traditional norms of respect and family closeness remain strong, most parents in this study have developed more dialogic, flexible, and adaptive communication styles in line with social change, technological advancements, and young people's growing expectations of autonomy. These findings also indicate that the family communication climate is not static it can be reconstructed through lived experience, reflection, and evolving role awareness among family members.

CONCLUSION

This research, conducted in Jennetallasa Village, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, shows that intergenerational communication strategies employed by parents in nurturing their children's post-marriage households are gentle, empathetic, and situation-sensitive. Parents strive to be present without dominating. They choose appropriate times to speak, avoid direct confrontation, use digital media such as WhatsApp, and foster more equal and friendly

relationships with their children and in-laws. This approach signifies a shift in parental roles from instructive figures to emotional companions, using communication as a bridge to maintain closeness without compromising the children's independence. The findings enrich family communication studies, particularly within the Indonesian cultural context that upholds strong family values, and extend the application of the Family Communication Patterns (FCP) theory in intergenerational relationships that evolve with time. For academics, this study opens new avenues for understanding family communication more holistically. Practically, it offers a guide for parents and family counsellors in cultivating harmonious relationships with younger generations. Future research should delve further into the experiences of children and in-laws, include more culturally diverse contexts, and adopt longitudinal approaches to understand how intergenerational communication evolves with time and life experience.

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