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Adolescent Perspectives on Fathering and Psychological Development in Minangkabau's Matrilineal Society

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Abstract. Research on paternal involvement has consistently demonstrated its significance for adolescents' psychological development. Nonetheless, a majority of empirical evidence is derived from Western, patriarchal, or nuclear-family contexts. Consequently, there remains limited understanding of how fathering is perceived and interpreted within matrilineal kinship systems, where fathers' structural positions are frequently deemed peripheral. To address this gap, the present qualitative investigation examines how Minangkabau adolescents interpret their fathers' roles and involvement, and how these experiences relate to their psychological development. Through an interpretive thematic analysis, open-ended questionnaire responses were obtained from Minangkabau adolescents residing in West Sumatra. The analysis uncovered recurrent themes in adolescents' narratives concerning paternal engagement in daily activities, emotional support during stress, and participation in decision-making processes. Findings suggest that adolescents predominantly perceive father involvement as a relational, meaning-based experience rather than a function of structural authority. Fathers were described as providers of moral guidance, emotional availability, practical assistance, and dialogical engagement in decision-making, which adolescents associated with improved self-regulation, self-confidence, school connectedness, and social competencies. Conversely, limited paternal presence and emotional inaccessibility were perceived as weakening the family's protective role in adolescents' psychological well-being. Importantly, the findings imply that within the Minangkabau matrilineal context, fathers' roles are neither redundant nor superseded by maternal kin. Instead, paternal involvement is negotiated within the family as a culturally embedded, need-supportive form of caregiving that complements matrilineal structures. This study advances the scholarly discourse by demonstrating that fathering retains psychological relevance in matrilineal societies and by elucidating the relational mechanisms through which paternal involvement supports adolescent development across diverse cultural settings.

Keywords; Adolescent psychological development, father involvement, matrilineal society, minangkabau.

INTRODUCTION

Fathers' roles in children's lives have gained greater emphasis in recent studies on child and adolescent growth. A substantial body of research shows that increased paternal

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involvement correlates with better cognitive, emotional, and social skills in children. Conversely, minimal paternal engagement or the lack of a father figure (fatherlessness) is associated with higher risks of psychosocial issues, such as behavioral challenges and emotional struggles (Scourfield et al., 2016). At both global and national levels, these concerns have attracted growing scholarly and policy attention. UNICEF (2021) suggests that approximately 20.9% of children in Indonesia grow up without an actively involved father, due to factors such as marital dissolution, paternal death, or extended employment-related separation. Complementing these estimates, recent official national statistics indicate structural constraints on paternal co-residence during early childhood. Data from the National Socio-Economic Survey (Survei Sosial Ekonomi Nasional, Susenas) show that, based on household rosters and parental co-residence indicators, only about 38% of Indonesian children aged 0–5 years live with both biological parents in the same household (*Badan Pusat Statistik*, 2024). While co-residence does not necessarily correspond to the quality of paternal engagement, this pattern indicates that a significant proportion of young children are subjected to daily caregiving circumstances in which fathers are either physically absent or minimally involved. Recent family profiling data further substantiate this trend. The BKKBN Indonesia (2025) reports that approximately one in four Indonesian families with children (25–26%) can be classified as experiencing paternal absence, whether due to non-cohabitation or limited functional paternal involvement. residence during early childhood. Data from the National Socio-Economic Survey (Survei Sosial Ekonomi Nasional, Susenas) show that, based on household rosters and parental co-residence indicators, only about 38% of Indonesian children aged 0–5 years live with both biological parents in the same household (*Badan Pusat Statistik*, 2024). While co-residence does not necessarily correspond to the quality of paternal engagement, this pattern indicates that a significant proportion of young children are subjected to daily caregiving circumstances in which fathers are either physically absent or minimally involved. Recent family profiling data further substantiate this trend. The BKKBN Indonesia (2025) reports that approximately one in four Indonesian families with children (25–26%) can be classified as experiencing paternal absence, whether due to non-cohabitation or limited functional paternal involvement. Recognizing the impact of these conditions on development and mental health, the Indonesian government has stepped up policy efforts to boost paternal engagement, most notably with the 2025 launch of the *Gerakan Ayah Teladan Indonesia (GATI)*. These initiatives highlight the critical importance of father involvement in protecting children's rights to comprehensive development and mental health, in line with national priorities for family growth and the integration of children's rights (*Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak*, 2024).

Conceptually, father involvement has often been defined in the developmental psychology literature as the extent to which fathers actively participate in caregiving and contribute to children's everyday lives (Lamb, 2004). Classical frameworks conceptualize father involvement as a multidimensional construct encompassing fathers' direct engagement with children, their physical and emotional availability, and their responsibility for ensuring children's material and developmental needs are met. (Lamb, 2004). Pleck (2012a) later refined this framework by emphasizing the quality of involvement, such as emotional closeness and warmth, alongside the quantity of time spent. In other words, meaningful father involvement is not measured solely by the time spent at home, but by the extent to which fathers actively participate in caregiving and foster positive relationships with their children. Consistent, supportive paternal involvement has been demonstrated to enhance children's sense of security and facilitate adaptive emotional regulation. contribute to family stability, thereby creating more favorable developmental environments (Cabrera et al., 2018). However, these influential frameworks have primarily been developed within Western, nuclear-family contexts and implicitly

assume co-residential parenting arrangements and patrilineal family structures. Such assumptions raise questions regarding their applicability in societies characterized by alternative kinship systems.

These concerns are particularly salient within the Indonesian cultural context, notably among the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra, whose social organization is characterized by a matrilineal kinship system. In Minangkabau society, lineage and inheritance are transmitted through the maternal line, thereby making the maternal family (the matrilineal household) a pivotal element in a child's upbringing and social identity (Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2024; Jamilah et al., 2024; Sukmawati, 2019). Historically, within the extended Minangkabau family, the mother's brother referred to as the *mamak* has occupied a structurally influential kinship role, bearing customary obligations to guide his nieces and nephews and frequently acting as a key decision-maker within the matrilineal household (Nishikawa, 2024). Within this framework, the role of the biological father in the Minangkabau household has traditionally been more marginal: the father is occasionally regarded as *sumando* (the wife's husband or son-in-law), esteemed but lacking authority over the wife's clan property or decision-making processes (Hartati et al., 2021).

This position relates to gendered power dynamics in which women (as *bundo kanduang*) play central roles in managing the *rumah gadang* (communal house) and hereditary property, while men more often assume public roles and obligations toward their natal families (Wiemar et al., 2021; Zainal, 2014). Such cultural configurations shape caregiving arrangements within Minangkabau families. Children are commonly raised within the maternal household, where mothers and maternal kin primarily provide daily care and emotional support. In more traditional settings, biological fathers tend to be less involved in routine caregiving activities beyond their role as economic providers (Nishikawa, 2024). Consequently, caregiving and emotional closeness are frequently culturally oriented towards the maternal and *mamak* domains. Simultaneously, fathers are typically expected, within customary norms, to maintain a certain degree of relational distance.

Nonetheless, the landscape of Minangkabau families is evolving alongside socio-economic progress, affecting paternal roles within the community. Urbanization and the increasing prevalence of nuclear families in urban West Sumatra result in more young couples residing separately from their extended clans (Tanner, 1982). In such nuclear households, fathers are expected to assume broader domestic and caregiving responsibilities because support from *mamak* or other relatives is not always available daily (Sukmawati, 2019; Tanner, 1982). These structural shifts may expand fathers' roles, for instance, by increasing direct involvement in child-rearing and decision-making that were once primarily the domain of the *mamak* (Elfira, 2023).

Adolescence is a pivotal developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, greater autonomy, and heightened emotional sensitivity (Santrock, 2018). Psychological development during this stage encompasses multiple domains, including emotional regulation, self-concept, autonomy, social relationships, and overall psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). Adolescents who are placed in nurturing caregiving environments are typically better prepared to handle developmental challenges. Conversely, insufficient support can lead to internalizing issues like anxiety and depression or externalizing behaviors such as aggression and delinquency (Achenbach et al., 2016; Eisenberg et al., 2010). Developmental scholars emphasize that parental support remains a crucial determinant of adolescents' success in navigating these tasks, even as peer relationships gain prominence (Papalia et al., 2009). In this regard, fathers may play a significant role by providing emotional security, guidance, and role modeling during a period of heightened psychological vulnerability (Hochgraf et al., 2021). However, in matrilineal societies where fathers' structural positions are often regarded as secondary, the ways paternal involvement is perceived, negotiated, and internalized by adolescents remain insufficiently understood.

Empirical research from the past ten years consistently confirms this idea. Long-term studies across different cultures show that the strength of the father–child relationship is a key predictor of adolescents’ psychological well-being. For example, Hochgraf et al. (2021) indicate that strong emotional bonds with fathers are correlated with reduced depressive symptoms, concerns regarding body image, and issues with self-esteem among both male and female adolescents. Notably, the beneficial effects of closeness to fathers were more extensive and enduring across various adolescent age groups than those associated with closeness to mothers, which appeared to be more confined to specific issues or age ranges (Hochgraf et al., 2021). These findings underscore the distinctive contribution of fathers to adolescent adaptation. While both parents are significant, fathers may provide unique advantages, such as promoting emotional resilience and confidence (Feldman & Daniel, 2021; Yu et al., 2022). Positive paternal involvement has also been associated with reduced behavioral issues and delinquency (Sarkadi et al., 2008). Regarding academic outcomes, active paternal participation in schooling and daily caregiving has been shown to enhance learning motivation and achievement (Purwindarini et al., 2014). Overall, the literature shows a clear pattern: fathers who are consistently present, involved in warm, supportive interactions, and take on caregiving roles tend to shield children and adolescents from developmental risks and help them reach their full potential (Cabrera et al., 2018; Panter-Brick et al., 2014).

Despite the growing body of evidence supporting the benefits of paternal involvement, several research gaps remain. Firstly, much of the existing research has been conducted within Western, patriarchal, or nuclear-family contexts, thereby underrepresenting culturally distinct kinship systems. Secondly, numerous studies depend on parental reports or indirect indicators of father involvement, whereas adolescents’ perspectives arguably the most immediate and relevant viewpoint through which parenting is perceived remain comparatively underexplored (Amato & Fowler, 2002; Finley & Schwartz, 2004; Hidalgo et al., 2023; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2023). Third, although correlations between paternal involvement and a variety of developmental outcomes have been extensively documented, fewer investigations have examined how adolescents themselves interpret the meaning, importance, and boundaries of paternal involvement within their specific cultural and relational contexts. In matrilineal societies, where paternal authority is not the central structural element, this gap becomes particularly pronounced, as paternal roles may be enacted symbolically, relationally, or through negotiation rather than through formal caregiving authority. In the Minangkabau context, empirical research on father involvement remains scant. Existing studies indicate that fathers remain actively involved in their children’s lives despite the prominence of maternal kin; however, there is limited understanding of how adolescents themselves comprehend and interpret these paternal roles. Consequently, important questions persist: How do Minangkabau adolescents perceive their fathers’ involvement in daily decision-making and emotional interactions? How do adolescents position paternal roles relative to maternal figures and maternal uncles (mamak) within a matrilineal kinship system? Which forms of paternal presence are regarded as meaningful, marginal, or symbolic, and in what ways are these meanings negotiated within adolescents’ narratives of family life?

In light of the aforementioned background and identified research gaps, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how adolescents interpret and ascribe meaning to father involvement in a matrilineal cultural setting. In matrilineal societies, wherein lineage and inheritance are transmitted through the maternal line, fathers are frequently regarded as occupying a structurally marginal position within kinship arrangements. Nevertheless, existing scholarly literature indicates that paternal roles may endure in more symbolic, relational, and negotiated forms within daily family life. Consequently, this study focuses on two principal questions: a) how Minangkabau adolescents conceptualize the forms, qualities, and relational importance of their

fathers' involvement, and b) how adolescents themselves interpret these paternal roles in relation to their experiences of autonomy, responsibility, emotional expression, and moral reasoning. Employing an interpretative qualitative approach, the study foregrounds adolescents' narratives to illuminate how father-adolescent relationships are understood and positioned within a matrilineal kinship system.

This study's contributions are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it broadens cross-cultural understanding of father involvement by showing how matrilineal social systems influence the forms, meanings, and roles of paternal engagement, which are usually studied within patriarchal settings. The findings could serve as a model for how father involvement is expressed, negotiated, and experienced in societies that are not patriarchal. Practically, the results have significant implications for culturally tailored family policies and intervention programs. Efforts to enhance paternal roles in indigenous communities should carefully consider local sociocultural factors that limit or support paternal engagement. Additionally, the study's outcomes can serve as an empirical basis for developing culturally appropriate adolescent mental health interventions that highlight the father's role in emotion regulation, motivation, and moral guidance, even in family systems outside patriarchal structures.

METHOD

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative Design with a reflexive thematic analysis approach to understand how Minangkabau adolescents perceive paternal involvement in daily life and its implications for their psychological development. This design is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that meanings about fatherhood are socially constructed, culturally situated, and best captured through participants' own narratives rather than predetermined categories. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The approach was selected because, given the contextual and under-researched nature of the problem, an exploratory qualitative approach was adopted, creative, flexible, and less structured, allowing an inductive understanding of complex social phenomena with relatively small samples and qualitative analysis of the data (Mudjiyanto, 2018).

The instrument consisted of a set of open-ended prompts designed to elicit adolescents' interpretations and meanings of father involvement within their everyday family contexts. Rather than measuring predefined dimensions, the prompts invited participants to reflect on how they perceived, experienced, and evaluated their fathers' roles. The final instrument comprised three sections. The first section focused on paternal involvement in daily life, with prompts such as: "How would you describe your father's role in your everyday life at home?" and "In what situations do you usually interact or communicate with your father?" The second section explored paternal responses to adolescents' emotional experiences, including prompts such as: "When you feel stressed, upset, or face a problem, what does your father usually do?" and "How do you feel about your father's response in those situations?" The third section examined paternal involvement in adolescents' decision-making processes, using prompts such as: "Can you describe how your father is involved when you make important decisions (e.g., education, friendships, activities)?" and "What does your father usually do when you have to decide something important for yourself?" Follow-up prompts encouraged participants to elaborate on how they understood the significance of their fathers' involvement or lack of involvement in these situations. The open-ended format allowed participants to narrate experiences in their own terms and to emphasize aspects they considered meaningful (Flick, 2017). The questionnaire was piloted with five Minangkabau adolescents to assess clarity, cultural appropriateness, and interpretive accessibility. Minor revisions were made to ensure that the prompts elicited concrete, experience-near narratives aligned with the study's interpretive aims (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The participants comprised 70 Minangkabau adolescents selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: 1) adolescents aged 12–20 years, regardless of gender; 2) of Minangkabau ethnicity; 3) currently residing with both biological parents; and 4) residing in West Sumatra Province. These criteria were carefully selected to ensure that participants maintained regular daily contact with their fathers within the Minangkabau cultural framework. Recruitment was carried out via schools and youth community networks, where school counsellors and community coordinators distributed the research invitation and survey link. Data collection was conducted over two weeks, utilizing Google Forms. Prior to questionnaire completion, participants received online informed consent detailing the study's purpose, procedures, participant rights, data confidentiality, and the researchers' contact information. Demographic data of participants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.
Demographic characteristics of participants

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	13-15 years	16	22,9
	16-18 years	35	50
	19-20 years	19	27,1
Sex	Male	31	44,3
	Female	39	55,7
Region of origin	Padang city	15	21,4
	Payakumbuh city	12	17,1
	Batusangkar city	12	17,1
	Tanah Datar regency	12	17,1
	Lima Puluh Kota regency	10	14,3
	Sijunjung regency	5	7,1
	Solok regency	4	5,7
Education status	Junior Secondary (SMP/MTs)	10	14,3
	Senior secondary (SMA/SMK)	28	40,0
	Undergraduate/Diploma		45,7
Parents' occupation	Farmer	24	34,3
	Self-employed	16	22,9
	Teacher	4	5,7
	Civil servant	3	4,3
	Driver	3	4,3

Data analysis followed the six stages of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke, (2006). 1) familiarisation with the data through repeated reading to obtain an overall understanding; 2) generating initial codes (open coding) to label and categorise meaningful units; 3) searching for preliminary themes (axial coding) by grouping related codes; 4) reviewing themes to ensure consistency with the raw data; 5) defining and naming themes (selective coding) that capture core meanings; and 6) producing a narrative report incorporating verbatim quotations from participants. Throughout the analysis, priority was given to completeness, depth, and transparency, with careful attention to preserving participants' original meanings and contextual nuances. The data were examined as they naturally emerged during data collection, allowing interpretations and thematic patterns to remain grounded in participants' accounts (Tong et al., 2007).

Coding was performed manually and organized with Microsoft Excel. A comprehensive codebook and documentation of theme development were kept to improve transparency and traceability of the analysis. Trustworthiness was also bolstered through member checking at the end of data collection, in which participants verified that the interpretations truly reflected their experiences and perspectives. When participants confirmed the accuracy of the findings, the credibility and reliability of the analysis were regarded as strengthened (Birt et al., 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of the open-ended responses revealed three main themes: 1) fathers' participation in daily caregiving, 2) fathers' reactions when adolescents face stress, and 3) fathers' involvement in decision-making. These themes reflect different yet interconnected aspects of paternal involvement as seen by Minangkabau adolescents, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding fathers' roles in daily family life. Each theme is explained in detail in the following sections, supported by quotations and contextual analysis rooted in the matrilineal Minangkabau culture.

Table 2.

Thematic Overview of Minangkabau Adolescents' Perceptions of Paternal Involvement

No	Theme	Subthemes
1	Fathers' involvement in day-to-day caregiving	Academic and religious guidance Daily routines and practical support Discipline and character values Quality time and humour Perceived limited or distant paternal presence Perceived imbalance in paternal authority and emotional responsiveness Situational caregiving and paternal substitution for maternal roles
2	Fathers' responses when adolescents experience stress	Active listening and open communication Providing advice and solutions Source of encouragement and motivation Perceived emotional distance and limited paternal accessibility
3	Fathers' roles in decision-making	Fathers as non-directive moral companions Fathers as sources of conditional trust and relational authorization Fathers' boundary-setting as moral protection Symbolic moral authority and epistemic trust in fathers' guidance Symbolic perseverance and repositioning of fathers' moral influence

Fathers' Involvement in Day-to-Day Caregiving

Analysis of adolescents' narratives revealed seven interrelated forms through which paternal involvement in everyday caregiving was constructed and interpreted within Minangkabau families. Rather than representing fixed categories of fathers, these forms reflect diverse experiential patterns

through which adolescents make sense of their fathers' presence, emotional availability, authority, and caregiving practices in daily life. The identified forms include: 1) academic and religious guidance, 2) daily routines and practical support, 3) discipline and character values, 4) quality time and humour, 5) perceived limited or distant paternal presence, 6) perceived imbalance in paternal authority and emotional responsiveness, and 7) situational caregiving and paternal substitution for maternal roles. Together, these forms illustrate the multifaceted and culturally situated nature of father involvement as perceived by adolescents in a matrilineal context. The thematic accounts are presented below.

Academic and Religious Guidance

Participants commonly described fathers' involvement through everyday academic support and religious guidance. Adolescents perceived this form of engagement as a salient expression of paternal presence within their daily lives. Fathers were described as reminding children to perform the five daily prayers, encouraging Qur'anic reading, and offering assistance with schoolwork. Participants interpreted these practices as routine yet meaningful interactions that signaled attention, concern, and moral guidance. Illustrative excerpts include:

"My father always reminds me to perform the five daily prayers and helps me review lessons at home" (S15).

"My father usually reminds me about mealtimes, bathing, and prayer" (S28).

"He reminds me of what matters for myself, such as not neglecting religious obligations" (S49).

"My father also helps with my and my siblings' schoolwork, always advising about worldly and spiritual matters like reminding us to pray, recite the Qur'an, give charity, and more" (S54).

Within the matrilineal Minangkabau cultural context where caregiving and moral socialization are traditionally associated with the maternal household participants interpreted these paternal practices as noteworthy and, in some cases, unexpected. Adolescents did not frame their fathers' involvement primarily in terms of authority or control, but rather as everyday reminders and guidance embedded in ordinary family routines. For many participants, such actions reflected a form of moral attentiveness, whereby fathers were perceived as actively monitoring and supporting both religious and academic responsibilities.

From an interpretive perspective, adolescents' accounts suggest that paternal academic and religious guidance functions as a symbolic expression of care rather than as an explicit instructional role. Fathers' reminders to pray or assist with schoolwork were often narrated as relational gestures that communicated concern for the child's personal conduct and future orientation. In this sense, the meaning attributed to paternal involvement lay not solely in the content of guidance but in the perceived intentionality behind it namely, the father's willingness to be present and engaged in the child's everyday life.

These perceptions resonate with attachment-informed interpretations of caregiving, which emphasize the significance of consistent and responsive parental presence in children's lived experiences (Bowlby, 2008; Grossmann & Grossmann, 2020). Nevertheless, rather than illustrating direct developmental outcomes, participants' narratives underscore how adolescents interpret paternal involvement as moral and emotional support. Academic and religious guidance are viewed

as components of a broader pattern of paternal attentiveness that signifies reliability, concern, and moral orientation within the familial context. Furthermore, adolescents' interpretations reflect culturally embedded meanings of fatherhood in Minangkabau society. Although fathers are not traditionally regarded as primary caregivers within the matrilineal household, participants perceive their fathers' engagement in learning and religious practices as consistent with Islamic and communal values that prioritize moral responsibility and guidance. In this regard, paternal involvement is understood not as a challenge to matrilineal norms but as a complementary role that coexists with maternal and kin-based caregiving structures. Overall, this subtheme demonstrates that Minangkabau adolescents predominantly conceptualize paternal academic and religious guidance as everyday expressions of care, moral concern, and relational presence.

Daily Routines and Practical Support

Participants characterized fathers' participation in daily routines and practical duties as a tangible, observable manifestation of involvement in their quotidian lives. This participation was frequently conveyed through routine endeavors such as accompanying children to and from school, assisting with morning preparations, reminding them to eat or bathe, aiding in household chores, and engaging in simple recreational activities together. Adolescents regarded these actions as customary yet significant practices that indicated paternal attentiveness and availability within the ongoing dynamics of family life. Representative accounts include:

"My father usually takes me to school and sometimes picks me up if he is not busy; he also takes me to practice and similar activities" (S23).

"My father helps me get ready for school and takes me there" (S30).

"My father pays close attention to my daily activities and tasks and always asks about what I do each day" (S35).

"My father cares for me well, helps with housework so the home feels clean and comfortable, takes us to and from places, helps with my and my siblings' schoolwork, and always invites us to play and chat" (S54).

From the adolescents' perspective, these routine practices were seen less as direct caregiving actions and more as signs of paternal presence in daily interactions. Fathers' involvement in everyday tasks such as transportation, household help, and spending time together was generally viewed as an indication of their attentiveness to the child's daily rhythms. Participants often highlighted consistency and proximity over intensity, suggesting that the key was the father's willingness to participate in ordinary moments.

In the matrilineal Minangkabau setting, where mothers and maternal relatives traditionally play the primary role in domestic caregiving, adolescents often saw fathers' engagement in daily routines as complementary rather than as a replacement for existing roles. Fathers' participation in practical tasks did not seem to threaten traditional kinship structures; rather, it was seen as a situational and relational contribution that coexisted with maternal and kin-based care. These actions were interpreted as expressions of responsibility and concern, not as attempts to assert authority or take over roles.

Interpreted through an attachment-informed lens, participants' narratives suggest that

routine paternal involvement is experienced as a form of relational reliability, in which fathers are perceived as accessible and responsive within everyday contexts (Bowlby, 2008; Grossmann & Grossmann, 2020). However, rather than emphasizing developmental outcomes, adolescents' accounts foreground how such involvement is construed as emotional presence expressed through practical actions. Helping with chores, providing transportation, or spending time together were understood as ways fathers "show up" in daily life. Participants also described shared household activities such as assisting with chores or engaging in casual conversation as opportunities for informal interaction. These moments were often narrated as spaces for connection rather than instruction, allowing adolescents to experience their fathers as approachable and engaged. In this sense, practical support was perceived not merely as task-oriented behaviour but as relational engagement embedded in routine family practices.

Overall, this theme illustrates that Minangkabau adolescents interpret fathers' involvement in daily routines and practical support as an important expression of attentiveness, responsibility, and relational presence. These findings underscore the value of examining father involvement through adolescents' subjective interpretations, particularly within cultural contexts where paternal caregiving is not traditionally foregrounded.

Discipline and Character Values

Participants commonly construed fathers' involvement in discipline and character formation as guidance-oriented rather than punitive. Fathers were described as figures who offered advice when adolescents made mistakes, provided moral direction regarding appropriate behaviour, and corrected actions in ways perceived as firm yet considerate. Rather than emphasizing control or punishment, adolescents narrated disciplinary encounters as moments of counsel, reflection, and moral clarification. Illustrative excerpts include:

"He is kind and likes to advise me if I speak wrongly or choose friends unwisely" (S14).

"He teaches his child what is good to do and what should not be done" (S18).

"My father usually takes part in giving advice when a child does not understand something or is in the wrong" (S43).

From the adolescents' perspectives, such practices positioned fathers as moral reference figures whose authority derived less from coercive power and more from their role as advisors. Discipline was interpreted as a relational process in which fathers helped clarify boundaries, evaluate behaviour, and distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable conduct. Participants often highlighted the manner in which advice was delivered calm, explanatory, and situational as central to the experience and understanding of paternal discipline. These narratives resonate with the authoritative parenting framework, which conceptualizes discipline as a balance between guidance and warmth (Baumrind, 1991; Lubis & Nashrillah, 2024). Importantly, however, in the present study, authoritative features emerge not as measured parenting styles but as adolescents' subjective interpretations of fathers' enactment of moral guidance. Adolescents did not describe discipline as a systematic strategy but as context-specific interactions in which fathers intervened through dialogue, reminders, and moral reasoning.

Participants also perceived paternal discipline as a form of moral modelling. When fathers offered advice on friendship choices, speech etiquette, or social conduct, adolescents interpreted

these actions as demonstrations of expected values rather than as abstract rules. In this sense, discipline was understood as observational and dialogic, aligning with social learning perspectives that emphasize learning through modelled behaviour and interpersonal interaction (Bandura, 1986). Fathers' everyday conduct and advice were perceived as reference points for evaluating one's own actions.

Within the Minangkabau matrilineal context, adolescents frequently situated paternal discipline as complementary to maternal and kin-based moral socialization. Fathers' guidance was described as reinforcing rather than replacing the moral norms transmitted within the maternal household. In this cultural setting, paternal involvement in discipline was often interpreted as providing balance introducing firmness, responsibility, and ethical reasoning alongside maternal values of care and harmony. Adolescents thus framed fathers' disciplinary roles as relationally negotiated rather than structurally dominant. Participants further described disciplinary interactions as collaborative rather than unilateral. Advice was often framed as something given "when needed," particularly when adolescents encountered dilemmas or uncertainty. Such moments were narrated as opportunities for reflection rather than confrontation, suggesting that discipline was experienced as co-regulatory engagement embedded in relational trust rather than as rigid enforcement.

Overall, this theme illustrates that Minangkabau adolescents interpret fathers' involvement in discipline and character formation as a process of moral guidance grounded in advice, example, and situational correction. Rather than attributing direct developmental outcomes, adolescents' accounts emphasize how discipline acquires meaning through relational tone, cultural context, and everyday interaction. These findings underscore the importance of understanding paternal discipline not as a set of behavioral techniques but as a socially and culturally situated practice that adolescents actively interpret in constructing their understanding of fatherhood.

Quality Time and Humour

Participants frequently construed fathers' involvement through shared time and humour as moments of emotional closeness that distinguished the father-child relationship from more formal or hierarchical interactions. Adolescents described everyday activities such as playing together, joking, casual conversation during meals, and visiting new places as meaningful occasions in which fathers appeared relaxed, approachable, and emotionally present. These interactions were not framed as structured parenting practices but rather as spontaneous, ordinary moments that fostered a sense of mutual enjoyment and connection. Representative narratives include:

"It is excellent and enjoyable. Sometimes my father invites us to play and often to visit places so we can experience something new in everyday life" (S1).

"My father also often jokes with me as a father and child would. I always feel cared for" (S4).

"Every time he comes home, he takes time to greet all of us and invites us to sit at the dining table to chat" (S25).

"My father always invites the children to play and tell stories" (S54).

From the adolescents' perspectives, humour and shared leisure were interpreted as expressions of paternal warmth rather than as deliberate strategies to achieve particular outcomes. Laughter,

playful teasing, and informal conversation were narrated as signs that fathers were emotionally available and willing to engage on equal footing. Participants often emphasized how such moments made fathers feel “closer” and less distant, suggesting that shared humour functioned as a relational bridge that softened generational and authority-based boundaries. These accounts align with relational and attachment-oriented interpretations of caregiving, in which emotional availability is communicated through everyday interaction rather than formal instruction (Bowlby, 2008; Grossmann & Grossmann, 2020). Participants did not explicitly describe long-term psychological outcomes; instead, they focused on the immediate experience of feeling noticed, welcomed, and emotionally included during shared moments.

Participants also interpreted shared humour as creating a safe conversational space. Casual joking and relaxed dialogue during play or family meals were described as opportunities to talk freely, share stories, and interact without fear of reprimand. In this sense, quality time was perceived as fostering openness rather than instruction, enabling adolescents to engage with fathers in ways that differed from those in disciplinary or advisory contexts. Such interpretations resonate with socio-emotional scaffolding perspectives, which emphasize how affective climates are co-constructed through interaction (Paley & Hajal, 2022) and Rogoff (2003), though adolescents themselves framed these interactions in experiential rather than theoretical terms.

Within the Minangkabau matrilineal context, participants often implicitly contrasted these moments of shared humour with more traditional expectations of paternal distance associated with the provider role. Fathers’ willingness to joke, play, and spend informal time together was perceived as noteworthy, signalling a form of involvement that extended beyond economic responsibility. Rather than framing this as a cultural transformation, adolescents described it as a personal and relational experience—one that made fathers appear more emotionally accessible within a family structure where daily caregiving is typically centred in the maternal household. Family routines, particularly shared meals accompanied by conversation and humour, were frequently mentioned as meaningful settings for such interactions. Adolescents interpreted these moments as routine yet significant, emphasizing their ordinariness rather than their intentionality. Shared humour during these routines was described as reinforcing a sense of togetherness and shaping adolescents’ understanding of family closeness in everyday life.

Overall, this theme illustrates that Minangkabau adolescents interpret quality time and shared humour as relational practices through which fathers communicate warmth, approachability, and emotional presence. Rather than attributing explicit developmental effects, participants’ narratives foreground how these everyday interactions shape their subjective understanding of fatherhood—as a role that can encompass affection, playfulness, and companionship alongside authority. These findings underscore the importance of examining paternal involvement as adolescents experience and interpret it within their cultural and relational contexts.

Perceived Limited or Distant Paternal Presence

This theme reflects adolescents’ perceptions of fathers as having a limited or emotionally distant presence within everyday family life. Participants did not describe fathers as absent from the household; instead, they emphasized a pattern in which fathers were experienced as physically present but relationally peripheral in daily interactions. Adolescents’ narratives foregrounded infrequent communication, restrained emotional expressiveness, and minimal involvement in routine caregiving, particularly when contrasted with mothers’ roles in everyday engagement.

Several participants articulated this perceived distance through comparisons with maternal involvement, noting that fathers were less engaged in routine interaction and emotional exchange:

"My father is rarely involved; my mother is more often involved" (S3).

"My father rarely cares for the children" (S22).

"He never gets involved in daily caregiving because he is busy working" (S24).

"My father is not very talkative; it is my mom who is usually involved" (S27).

From adolescents' perspectives, this relational distance was commonly attributed to fathers' work demands and role specialization within the family. Fathers were frequently perceived as prioritizing economic provision, with limited participation in everyday activities such as conversation, supervision, or shared routines. Rather than framing this as neglect, adolescents tended to interpret paternal involvement through a functional lens, in which caregiving responsibilities were unevenly distributed between parents. Mothers were perceived as primary sources of emotional availability and daily interaction, while fathers were positioned as functional contributors whose involvement was more task-oriented and situational.

This pattern of interpretation aligns with the notion of instrumental fatherhood, in which paternal responsibility is primarily defined by economic provision rather than relational accessibility (André et al., 2025; Lamb, 2004). Importantly, adolescents' accounts did more than describe paternal behavior; they explained how these role arrangements are experienced and understood in daily life. Limited interaction was seen as reducing opportunities for informal chats, shared reflection, or emotional connection elements adolescents inherently linked with closer relationships. In the Indonesian and specifically Minangkabau cultural setting, these perceptions are rooted in broader gender roles that position fathers as providers and authority figures, while mothers are socially recognized as primary caregivers and emotional supports. Adolescents' stories indicate that these cultural norms both normalize paternal distance and highlight it as a prominent relational feature. Therefore, limited paternal presence is best viewed not as complete absence but as a form of relational distance resulting from adolescents' interpretations of everyday interactions shaped by cultural role expectations. Overall, this theme emphasizes how adolescents assess paternal involvement through patterns of accessibility and daily engagement, highlighting that mere physical presence does not necessarily equate to perceived involvement. Fathers were regarded as less present, not because they were unseen, but because their participation in everyday relational exchanges was considered more limited than maternal involvement.

Perceived Imbalance in Paternal Authority and Emotional Responsiveness

This theme encapsulates adolescents' perceptions of a disparity in paternal authority and emotional responsiveness during daily interactions. Instead of characterizing parenting styles as static categories, participants described how particular paternal responses were perceived as inadequately attuned to their relational and emotional requirements. The adolescents' narratives revealed two predominant interpretive patterns: fathers perceived as providing autonomy without guidance, and fathers perceived as exerting control without emotional involvement. In both instances, adolescents highlighted the experience of imbalance rather than the mere presence or absence of discipline.

Several participants noted that fathers were seen as permissive, granting significant

autonomy but providing little corrective feedback or guidance. It was viewed not as support but as a lack of direction or engagement in decision-making processes:

"My father always fulfills all my requests" (S21).

"My father never scolds me even when I am wrong" (S55).

Conversely, some adolescents viewed their fathers' reactions as overly strict or punitive, especially when errors happened. They felt these interactions focused on asserting authority without providing explanations, open dialogue, or emotional support.

"My father is rather strict when I cause trouble" (S63).

"If I make a mistake, he keeps scolding me" (S68).

Notably, adolescents did not characterize these experiences as intrinsically negative or positive aspects of fatherhood. Instead, they highlighted how such responses influenced their perception of relational comfort, emotional security, and openness to communication with their fathers. The participants' narratives emphasized the lack of equilibrium between guidance and emotional responsiveness, which adolescents associated with significant paternal engagement.

Interpreted through an interpretive developmental lens, these perceptions resonate with but are not reducible to existing parenting frameworks that distinguish between warmth and control (Baumrind, 1991). In this study, theoretical constructs are employed with caution to elucidate how adolescents interpret paternal behaviour, rather than to classify fathers' practices. Adolescents' narratives indicate that paternal authority was most impactful when accompanied by explanation, emotional presence, and dialogic engagement, whereas authority exercised without relational attunement was perceived as distancing.

In the Minangkabau culture, perceptions of paternal roles often align with expectations of emotional restraint and moral authority. Some adolescents see permissive responses as a way to compensate for their fathers' limited involvement in daily life, while authoritarian responses are viewed as acts of culturally approved paternal authority. These views show that adolescents' understanding is influenced both by personal interactions and culturally ingrained norms about fatherhood.

Overall, this theme underscores how Minangkabau adolescents assess paternal involvement not merely in terms of behavioral control or autonomy, but in terms of the perceived congruence between authority and emotional responsiveness. Fathers are regarded as meaningfully engaged when adolescents perceive guidance and emotional acknowledgment. Conversely, perceived disparities in these aspects are understood as forms of involvement that, although existent, are relationally deficient.

Situational Caregiving and Paternal Substitution for Maternal Roles

The theme encapsulates adolescents' perceptions of paternal involvement as contingent caregivers, especially in circumstances where maternal availability is temporarily limited. Instead of depicting ongoing or habitual engagement, participants highlighted instances when fathers took on tangible caregiving duties during maternal absences. These accounts emphasized fathers' roles in routine activities such as overseeing daily routines, preparing meals, and offering companionship,

thereby situating paternal involvement within particular situational parameters.

Several adolescents illustrated this pattern by describing moments when fathers became the primary caregiver due to the absence of mothers:

“My dad looks after me if my mom has an event to attend” (S42).

“My father is involved when my mother is not at home, and only my father is present” (S50).

“When mother is away, my father handles meals and household needs” (S66).

From adolescents’ perspectives, this involvement was seen as practical and responsive, demonstrating fathers’ ability to step in as caregivers when needed. Participants did not view these actions as signs of ongoing closeness; instead, they saw them as practical responses to specific situations. This interpretation supports co-parenting views, which see caregiving substitution as an adaptive way to ensure continuity in children’s daily care when one parent is temporarily absent (Feinberg, 2003).

Notably, adolescents often characterized paternal involvement as conditional rather than habitual. Caregiving by fathers was perceived as occurring “when needed,” emphasizing that the primary responsibility for daily care remained culturally associated with mothers. These accounts thus reveal how adolescents distinguish between situational caregiving and ongoing involvement, positioning paternal roles as supplementary rather than central to daily family functioning.

Within the matrilineal Minangkabau context, these narratives carry particular significance. Established caregiving arrangements emphasize maternal and maternal-kin responsibility for daily child-rearing, while fathers are traditionally positioned outside routine caregiving domains (Miko et al., 2024; Sanday, 2002). Adolescents’ accounts of paternal substitution thus reflect how fathers’ caregiving is interpreted as legitimate yet bounded, emerging primarily under specific conditions rather than as a normative expectation.

Simultaneously, these contextual experiences contributed to adolescents’ broader interpretation of fatherhood. Fathers were regarded as capable of providing nurture and practical assistance, even if such abilities were demonstrated intermittently. Instead of indicating a complete reorganization of paternal roles, these narratives imply a degree of role flexibility in which fathers are perceived as potential caregivers whose involvement is observable in the absence of mothers. Consequently, situational caregiving functions as an interpretive space whereby adolescents acknowledge paternal support while concurrently reaffirming culturally ingrained caregiving hierarchies.

Fathers’ Responses When Adolescents Experience Stress

The thematic analysis of adolescents’ open-ended responses revealed four key interpretive themes that show how participants perceive and understand their fathers’ responses to adolescent stress: 1) active listening and open communication, 2) offering advice and solutions, 3) serving as a source of encouragement and motivation, and 4) perceived emotional distance and limited paternal accessibility. These themes represent common patterns in how adolescents experience, interpret, and assign meaning to their fathers’ responses during psychological stress. The detailed themes are outlined below.

Active Listening and Open Communication

This theme encapsulates adolescents' perceptions of fathers as communicative figures characterized by their willingness to listen and their emotional availability as conversational partners. Participants depicted paternal involvement, emphasizing attentive listening devoid of immediate judgment, thereby creating a supportive environment for emotional expression. Additionally, shared calming activities were highlighted as facilitators of open dialogue. Instead of emphasizing directives or authority, adolescents perceived these interactions as instances where fathers were approachable and attentive to their experiences.

Several participants emphasized the importance of being heard and understood within everyday interactions. For example, one adolescent noted:

"My father is always willing to listen to my complaints; although he sometimes jumps to conclusions, I understand how he feels. He never demands anything of me, but he will be angry if I do something wrong" (S4).

Others described "heart-to-heart" conversations as central to how they related to their fathers:

"My father always supports me. He usually invites me to talk heart-to-heart; he is the kind of person who can give the best advice to his child so that I can confide in him freely" (S49).

In these accounts, adolescents did not portray their fathers as passive listeners alone, but as interlocutors who combined attentiveness with guidance grounded in lived experience. It was often accompanied by shared activities that created a relaxed conversational atmosphere:

"My father is always ready to listen without judging, giving me space to speak and express my feelings. He often offers wise advice based on his own experience and helps me see problems from multiple perspectives. He also frequently invites me to do stress-reducing activities such as walking, playing sports, or simply spending time with the family" (S57).

From the adolescents' perspectives, such interactions were meaningful not because of their presumed outcomes, but because they signalled emotional openness and relational accessibility. Listening without immediate judgment was interpreted as an indication that fathers were willing to engage with adolescents' inner experiences, even when disagreement or correction might eventually occur. In this sense, active listening was understood as part of an ongoing relational process rather than as a discrete parenting technique. When situated within existing theoretical literature, these perceptions resonate with attachment-informed and relational frameworks that conceptualize parental responsiveness as being conveyed through everyday communicative practices (Bowlby, 1988, 2008; Grossmann & Grossmann, 2020). Adolescents' narratives suggest that open communication was construed as making fathers "available" as conversational partners and sources of perspective, particularly during moments of emotional uncertainty.

Within the Minangkabau cultural context, where fathers are often associated with authority and restraint, adolescents' descriptions of open dialogue carry additional interpretive significance. Being invited to speak freely and to engage in informal conversation appeared to contrast with

more traditional expectations of paternal distance, thereby shaping adolescents' understanding of their fathers as relationally present rather than solely authoritative. Thus, active listening and open communication emerged as a form of paternal involvement that adolescents experienced as fostering closeness and mutual respect, grounded in everyday interaction rather than explicit instruction or control.

Providing Advice and Solutions

This theme encapsulates adolescents' perceptions of paternal figures as primarily offering advice and solution-oriented responses to their challenges. Participants consistently characterized paternal engagement as emphasizing rational explanations, experiential insights, and occasionally moral or religious frameworks when adolescents faced stress or uncertainty. Rather than emphasizing emotional expressiveness, adolescents conceptualized their fathers' involvement as focused on assisting them in 'thinking through' problems and determining practical courses of action.

Several narratives highlighted fathers' tendency to contextualize adolescents' experiences by drawing on their own life histories or broader perspectives:

"Usually my father provides an overview and experiences that relate or are similar to the problem I am facing; he also gives me advice when I have difficulty deciding on a course of action" (S25).

Other participants directly compared paternal methods with maternal responses, viewing fathers' guidance as more cautious and practical.

"My father is not the type who immediately hugs me when I am sad, like my mother does; he has a different way. He prefers a realistic, logical approach and rarely shows emotion in our presence. He usually gives solutions related to the problem and explains that what I am going through is a normal part of life" (S29).

In these narratives, adolescents did not depict their fathers' conduct as emotionally aloof; instead, they characterized it as representing a unique form of care marked by rationality, normalization of hardship, and a focus on progress. This view was concurred by participants who described fathers as dissuading extended dwelling on past events.

"My father will not let me dwell on problems and looks for the best solution so I can quickly return to normal life" (S35).

From the adolescents' point of view, advice and problem-solving were seen as signs of concern delivered through guidance, rather than emotional reassurance. Fathers were viewed as providing structure and guidance, helping adolescents understand challenges as manageable and context-dependent rather than overwhelming. These narratives highlight how adolescents interpret paternal actions serving as their subjective meaning-making process rather than offering objective evaluations of effectiveness or growth outcomes. Several participants also noted that moral or religious elements occasionally accompanied advice-giving:

"When I have problems and feel stressed, my father is the one who gives advice even if he sometimes seems a bit reserved; he also gives me encouragement and prayers and offers support" (S54).

In the Indonesian context, where religious values are deeply woven into daily life, these elements were viewed as part of paternal guidance, framing challenges within larger moral or spiritual contexts. Adolescents saw these practices as reinforcing a sense of order and purpose, rather than treating them as direct emotional interventions.

Within the existing literature, adolescents' perspectives align with models of paternal involvement emphasizing instrumental and cognitive engagement (Parsons & Bales, 1956; Paquette, 2004). In this study, these models are used to understand adolescents' views, not to determine psychological impacts. The findings indicate that fathers were seen as roles focused on solving problems, aiding decision-making, and providing moral guidance, which adolescents saw as separate from more emotionally expressive caregiving behaviors.

In the Minangkabau cultural context where fathers are traditionally regarded as rational authorities and moral exemplars advising and problem-solving are understood as culturally consistent modes of paternal engagement. Narratives from adolescents indicate that such guidance was not perceived as detached, but rather as a recognizable and meaningful expression of care through which fathers exhibited responsibility and concern. Consequently, advising and problem-solving emerged as significant forms of paternal involvement as perceived by adolescents, rooted in everyday interactions and culturally constructed expectations rather than in explicitly stated outcomes.

Source of Encouragement and Motivation

This theme highlights how adolescents view fathers as sources of encouragement and motivation during stressful times, through both emotional support and practical assistance. Participants noted that paternal involvement went beyond giving advice, encompassing gestures aimed at boosting morale, such as enjoying activities together, offering comforting words, or providing material help. Adolescents saw these actions as expressions of support focused on distraction, companionship, and reassurance, rather than deep emotional conversations. Some adolescents described shared recreational activities as a primary way fathers responded to stress:

"My father and I share the same mindset: we deal with stress by having fun, and he gives me more money than usual" (S2).

In this context, encouragement was understood not solely as a verbal affirmation but also as an invitation to reconceptualize stress through pleasurable experiences. The allocation of supplementary funds or leisure opportunities was perceived by the adolescent as a component of this motivational strategy, indicating attentiveness and concern in a manner that appeared approachable and familiar. Other participants acknowledged paternal encouragement while simultaneously positioning maternal support as more emotionally salient:

"My father definitely gives me encouragement and a way out, but I usually get more of this from my mother; when there is a problem, I talk to my mother" (S56).

This narrative illustrates how adolescents distinguish between paternal and maternal roles in stressful situations. Fathers are seen as sources of encouragement and motivation, though usually in complementary or secondary roles compared to mothers' emotional support. These distinctions reveal adolescents' interpretations of parental roles rather than judgments about their effectiveness or adequacy.

Throughout various narratives, encouragement extended beyond mere verbal expressions to encompass material and activity-based assistance. Adolescents perceived these gestures such as offering financial support, facilitating leisure activities, or engaging in relaxed shared time as culturally acknowledged manifestations of paternal care. In Indonesian and broader Asian contexts, indirect expressions of affection through material provision and shared activities are widely understood as legitimate means for fathers to demonstrate concern (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Zhang & Wu, 2025). Participants' accounts suggest that these practices carried emotional meaning, even when they did not involve explicit emotional disclosure.

Adolescents' descriptions also highlight variability in the consistency with which fathers provided motivational support. Some participants viewed this involvement as context-dependent rather than regular, suggesting that fathers' encouragement was present but not always vital in daily coping. In the matrilineal Minangkabau culture where mothers are seen as primary emotional caregivers adolescents often regard fathers' motivational acts as additional, influenced by wider family role norms (Fajri et al., 2025; Miko et al., 2024).

This theme conceptually illustrates how adolescents see encouragement as a mix of emotional signals and practical actions. The findings reveal how teens interpret and assign meaning to their fathers' attempts to support them during stressful times. For these adolescents, encouragement and motivation are ways fathers demonstrate concern, presence, and solidarity, reflecting the cultural norms of fatherhood in the Minangkabau community.

Perceived Emotional Distance and Limited Paternal Accessibility

Adolescents characterized their experiences wherein fathers were perceived as emotionally distant or minimally accessible within daily family interactions, especially in contexts involving personal issues or emotional challenges. Rather than portraying a total paternal absence, participants recurrently depicted fathers as physically present yet relationally marginal, exhibiting limited engagement in emotional discourse and caregiving in comparison to mothers. Illustrative accounts include:

"My father's emotional support is minimal compared to my mother's when facing problems" (S3).

"My father provides little support, and I never tell him about my problems" (S7).

"All my life I have never told my father about my problems, so he has never provided emotional support" (S22).

"He never provides support because I suppress and keep my problems to myself" (S23).

From adolescents' perspectives, this pattern was not construed as neglect or rejection; instead, it was understood as a relational distance influenced by customary family roles and communication norms. Fathers were generally regarded as less accessible for emotional disclosure, prompting adolescents to depend on mothers in times of distress predominantly. Several accounts demonstrate that the limited involvement of fathers in emotional affairs was intricately linked to adolescents' own choices to withhold disclosure, implying a reciprocal dynamic wherein perceived paternal inaccessibility and adolescent emotional restraint mutually reinforced each other.

In the matrilineal Minangkabau culture, these perceptions are especially prominent. Traditional family roles focus on maternal involvement in daily care and emotional support, with fathers typically seen as authority figures and providers. Consequently, adolescents' stories reveal a culturally ingrained view of fatherhood, where emotional distance is considered normal, even though it carries personal significance in their experiences. Therefore, fathers' limited emotional accessibility is viewed less as a personal flaw and more as a typical aspect of paternal roles within the family structure.

Notably, adolescents' narratives underscore how paternal emotional distance was established through quotidian interaction patterns rather than isolated incidents. The lack of emotional exchange such as discussions of personal issues or demonstrations of empathy contributed to adolescents' perception that fathers were not the primary providers of emotional support. In this context, "absence" should be understood not as physical non-presence, but as a relational stance shaped by cultural norms, communication practices, and adolescents' interpretive processes.

Overall, this theme highlights that adolescents' perceptions of limited paternal accessibility are rooted in the wider cultural norms of fatherhood in Minangkabau society. Instead of simply labeling fathers as uninvolved, adolescents expressed nuanced views of paternal distance as a relational and culturally embedded experience, showing how father involvement is understood, negotiated, and valued within a matrilineal family setting.

Fathers' Roles in Adolescents' Decision-Making

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses revealed five key themes about how adolescents perceive and interpret their fathers' involvement in decision-making: 1) fathers as non-directive moral supporters, 2) fathers as providers of conditional trust and relational approval, 3) fathers' boundary-setting as a form of moral protection, 4) symbolic moral authority and epistemic trust in fathers' guidance, and 5) symbolic perseverance and reassessment of fathers' moral influence. These themes highlight common patterns in adolescents' stories about how fathers are positioned, experienced, and understood during decision-making processes. The explanations of these themes are detailed below.

Fathers as Non-Directive Moral Companions

Adolescents frequently described their fathers not as decision-makers who impose choices, but as moral companions who accompany their decision-making processes through advice, reflection, and experiential guidance. In this positioning, fathers were perceived as providing perspectives rather than prescriptions, enabling adolescents to weigh options, anticipate consequences, and situate their choices within broader moral and social considerations. As one participant noted:

"My father's upbringing and the advice he often gives help me think about the risks and benefits of a decision, see which option has greater potential, and achieve success by sharing useful experiences" (S28).

From the adolescents' accounts, paternal involvement in decision-making was primarily interpreted as non-directive guidance. Fathers were described as offering counsel without restricting autonomy, as reflected in the statement:

"My father never limits the decisions I make; he only advises me to choose what is better for me" (S39).

Rather than exercising control, fathers were perceived as playing a reflective role, allowing adolescents to retain agency while remaining oriented toward familial values and moral considerations. Importantly, adolescents did not frame this advisory role solely in pragmatic terms. Several participants emphasized the moral dimension of paternal guidance, viewing fathers' advice as a vehicle for transmitting values and social orientation. As articulated by one adolescent:

"My father's role is significant because he instills good moral values in me so that I can become a respected person" (S40).

Decision-making herein is understood not merely as instrumental choice but as a process embedded within expectations of moral conduct and social respect. Within the context of the matrilineal Minangkabau society, this non-directive moral companionship holds significant cultural importance. Given that formal authority over domestic and lineage matters resides primarily within the maternal line and maternal kin, fathers are positioned more as symbolic and moral figures rather than as structural decision-makers. Narratives from adolescents suggest that paternal influence is exerted through experiential wisdom and moral credibility rather than through directive power. Consequently, paternal advisory roles are perceived as culturally appropriate forms of involvement that align with matrilineal role distributions while maintaining paternal relevance in adolescents' evaluative reasoning. These accounts indicate that adolescents interpret paternal involvement as guidance rather than domination, with advice serving as a relational resource rather than an authoritative mandate. Fathers are seen as providing orientation points moral, experiential, and reflective that adolescents may utilize while maintaining responsibility for their own decisions. Such interpretations highlight that paternal influence in this context is subtle and dialogic, shaped by cultural norms that prioritize autonomy within relational and moral frameworks.

Fathers as Sources of Conditional Trust and Relational Authorization

Adolescents often perceived paternal involvement in decision-making not as directive control but rather as an embodiment of conditional trust that enabled them to exercise autonomy. Fathers were characterized as figures who supported adolescents' choices while implicitly defining moral and relational boundaries about what was deemed appropriate, reasonable, or socially acceptable. Within this framework, paternal influence was experienced less as authority enforced through explicit instruction and more as relational authorization an indication that adolescents were trusted to make decisions, provided their choices remained consistent with shared family values. Illustrative accounts include:

"My father definitely provides input about academics, friendships, and other matters. He always leaves the final decision to me and accepts it as long as it is good and reasonable" (S56).

"My father supports any activity I do as long as it is good and does not harm others" (S23).

"He lets his child freely choose, as long as it is not along a bad path" (S50)

From the adolescents' perspectives, this form of paternal involvement conveyed a sense of being entrusted rather than supervised. Fathers were perceived as offering support and protection particularly in educational and social domains while deliberately refraining from rigid control. For example, one adolescent noted:

"My father always supports my wishes, continuing education, and in social life, he protects his child from negative environments" (S36).

These narratives suggest that adolescents perceive paternal support as framed by bounded trust rather than unconditional permissiveness. Trust was invariably depicted as dependent on responsibility and moral self-regulation. Adolescents highlighted that paternal trust functions within clearly delineated expectations concerning propriety and family values, as articulated by another participant:

"My father has a big influence on my life and on the decisions I make. He always supports my choices as long as they are good and not out of line, and he sometimes helps with the decision itself" (S54).

Importantly, adolescents did not see this trust as paternal withdrawal. Instead, fathers were viewed as morally present acting as evaluative references while letting adolescents take charge. This approach takes a relational stance, supporting autonomy without reducing paternal involvement, allowing adolescents to see decision-making as both self-driven and relational.

In the matrilineal Minangkabau setting, this pattern takes on special importance. Since daily caregiving and domestic authority are culturally linked to mothers and maternal relatives, fathers' trust signals serve more as symbols of legitimacy than as instruments of control. Teenagers' accounts indicate that paternal trust is a culturally adaptive way for fathers to remain involved, allowing them to influence adolescents' judgments without disrupting traditional matrilineal roles.

For adolescents, paternal entrustment was understood as recognition of their capacity to make decisions and accept the consequences of their choices. This recognition appeared to influence how adolescents positioned themselves within the family: not solely as dependents, but as emerging moral agents whose decisions held significance. In this regard, paternal support and trust were perceived less as distinct parenting practices and more as relational messages affirming adolescents' autonomy within a shared moral framework.

Overall, this theme demonstrates that paternal involvement in decision-making is not solely manifested through advice or boundary-setting, but also through the intentional act of granting trust. Fathers' willingness to "let go" while maintaining moral presence was perceived by adolescents as a meaningful form of engagement, reflecting a culturally situated balance among autonomy, responsibility, and relational embeddedness.

Paternal Boundary-Setting as Moral Protection

Adolescents characterized paternal involvement in decision-making as comprising instances of restriction and prohibition, which, from their viewpoints, were perceived as acts of protection rather than assertions of dominance. Fathers were regarded as delineating boundaries within specific domains such as education, hobbies, or social relationships while concurrently offering justifications that underscored care, health, and long-term well-being. These limitations were not perceived as arbitrary but as embedded within relational explanations that connected restrictions to the father's concern for the child's safety and future. For example, one participant recollected:

"My father forbids hobbies like the arts, drum band, etc. He says they will make my body ache" (S13).

This response frames the restriction as grounded in physical concern. Another adolescent described an initially conflicting decision that later became intelligible through paternal reasoning:

“My father always provides reasons from different perspectives. When I was upset about not being allowed to study outside West Sumatra, I was initially angry, but later I understood it was because he cares about me. I am the youngest of five and rather prone to illness, so he suggested studying in Padang because it is close, and if I get sick, he can come immediately. That is why I involve him in decisions, including those about his social life. His reasons are always for my good” (S29).

Such accounts suggest that adolescents did not merely perceive paternal limits as constraints but interpreted them in accordance with the meanings associated with the explanations provided. Across narratives, fathers’ boundary-setting was understood as a form of moral positioning, in which appeals to responsibility, protection, and foresight justified limits. Even in instances where adolescents regarded fathers as “overprotective” (S69), this perception was often accompanied by an acknowledgment that the restriction was driven by concern rather than coercion. This interpretive framing indicates that adolescents distinguished between control exercised through authority and boundaries articulated through care-based reasoning.

“Very important, especially for friendships and the future, my father is somewhat overprotective, although it contradicts what I want, he says it is for my own good” (S69).

In the matrilineal Minangkabau context, this pattern holds particular significance. Since mothers and maternal relatives typically hold formal authority over domestic and kinship issues, paternal boundary-setting serves more as symbolic moral guidance rather than structural control. Adolescents’ stories indicate that fathers’ authority in setting limits does not stem from hierarchical power but from their ability to justify restrictions in relational and ethical terms. Therefore, boundaries act as moral signals that shape adolescents’ decisions within shared family values rather than as strict rules enforced by sanctions.

Notably, adolescents’ acceptance or reinterpretation of paternal boundaries depended on whether an explanation was provided. Restrictions accompanied by reasoning tended to be seen as protective, while unexplained limits could be viewed as overbearing or disconnected from adolescents’ goals. In this way, boundary-setting was an interactive process in which meaning was shaped through dialogue rather than imposed unilaterally.

Overall, this theme indicates that paternal involvement in decision-making encompasses not just guidance or advice but also moments of restriction, which gain significance through relational justification. Fathers’ boundaries, as adolescents see them, act as moral cues that balance independence with care, reflecting a culturally specific form of paternal engagement within a matrilineal family system.

Symbolic Moral Authority and Epistemic Trust in Fathers’ Guidance

This theme describes how adolescents perceive their fathers as both symbolic moral authorities and trusted sources of knowledge in decision-making. Instead of merely considering fathers as formal authority figures, adolescents describe them as moral anchors whose life experiences and integrity confer legitimacy upon their guidance. Fathers are positioned as influential figures whose opinions are actively sought to diminish uncertainty, prevent potential errors,

and navigate moral complexities. This process of meaning-making is exemplified in adolescents' narratives of routinely consulting their fathers prior to making significant decisions.

"Very important, because I always ask him about everything that I should choose so that if I make a mistake, it will not be as big as if I had not asked him" (S2).

"I always ask my father's opinion because I believe he has more experience" (S67).

From the adolescents' perspectives, paternal influence was rooted in epistemic trust the conviction that fathers possess experiential knowledge and moral judgment worth relying upon. Significantly, this trust was not perceived as coercive authority but as a voluntary inclination towards fathers as dependable moral guides. Adolescents regarded their fathers' guidance as protective rather than restrictive, thereby influencing their evaluation of risks and consequences within daily social situations. This interpretative perspective is further exemplified in narratives that highlight loyalty and moral restraint.

"Highly influential. In social life or friendships, I follow the group, but there are things I should not follow because I must maintain my father's trust; therefore, whatever decision I make, I must ask his opinion" (S4).

In this context, adolescents conceptualized moral decision-making not as a matter of obedience but as a means of maintaining relational trust and moral accountability. The influence of fathers was primarily symbolic, shaping adolescents' internalized concerns regarding trust, honor, and relational responsibility, rather than through direct regulation. Additionally, adolescents depicted fathers as moral exemplars whose conduct served as reference points across generations.

"My father's influence is significant because he is a role model for me and my younger siblings" (S8).

This perception highlights the transgenerational aspect of paternal moral authority. Adolescents perceived their fathers' daily behaviors as implicit moral guidance, through which they acquired, assessed, and transmitted values within the sibling network. Consequently, paternal influence encompassed more than mere advice, extending to the modeling of integrity, responsibility, and consistency. In the matrilineal Minangkabau context, this theme holds particular cultural significance. Although structural authority in kinship and inheritance is traditionally vested in maternal lines and maternal uncles (*mamak*), adolescents' narratives positioned fathers as custodians of moral order through symbolic authority. Fathers' influence was understood to derive from personal qualities wisdom, honesty, and lived experience rather than formal power. This finding suggests that paternal involvement in Minangkabau families operates through moral legitimacy rather than hierarchical dominance.

Overall, this theme emphasizes that adolescents perceive paternal involvement not primarily as behavioral control or result-oriented influence, but as a relational and symbolic resource that informs their moral reasoning. Fathers are conceptualized as moral mirrors figures whose trust, example, and counsel help adolescents evaluate who they aspire to become. In this regard, paternal influence is experienced as meaning-centered and identity-relevant, fostering the internalization of moral values within a culturally embedded framework of relational trust and responsibility.

Symbolic Persistence and Repositioning of Paternal Moral Influence

This theme highlights how adolescents perceive limited paternal involvement not simply as a lack of influence but as a redefinition of paternal importance in their decision-making. Instead of viewing fathers as ineffective or disengaged, adolescents explained a nuanced perspective where paternal influence is selective, symbolic, or less prominent especially compared to maternal guidance or their own internal judgment. Some adolescents mentioned depending more on maternal viewpoints for daily or educational choices, or seeing decision-making as a personal responsibility:

“For decisions about education, I think I would rather ask my mother for advice” (S53).

“Not very influential because the decision is in my hands” (S58).

Importantly, adolescents did not uniformly interpret this pattern as emotional neglect or relational deficiency. Instead, their accounts suggest that reduced paternal salience was often understood as situationally appropriate within the matrilineal Minangkabau family structure, in which mothers and maternal kin hold primary caregiving and decision-making roles. In this context, adolescents made sense of paternal distance as a culturally normative distribution of familial roles rather than a personal shortcoming of fathers.

From adolescents’ perspectives, paternal influence was not necessarily absent; instead, it was transformed. Fathers were described as less involved in routine deliberations, yet remained relevant as implicit moral or symbolic references. Even when adolescents framed decisions as “their own,” this autonomy was often narrated against a backdrop of previously internalized paternal values. Thus, minimal overt involvement did not automatically equate to a lack of paternal meaning.

This interpretation challenges a deficit-oriented reading of paternal influence. Rather than positioning fathers along a binary of “influential versus uninfluential,” adolescents’ narratives indicate a continuum of paternal presence, ranging from active consultation to symbolic or internalized guidance. In matrilineal settings, this repositioning reflects adaptive role negotiation rather than disengagement. Fathers’ authority was not enacted through frequent intervention but through earlier value transmission that continued to inform adolescents’ evaluative frameworks.

At the same time, adolescents’ meaning-making also revealed ambivalence. While some perceived paternal non-intervention as a sign of trust and autonomy, others implicitly associated minimal involvement with limited communication or emotional distance. In these cases, the absence of paternal dialogue reduced opportunities for reflection and moral negotiation, highlighting the importance of accessibility even within autonomy-supportive arrangements.

Overall, this theme directly addresses the study’s research aim by illuminating how adolescents interpret and attribute meaning to variations in paternal involvement, rather than categorizing fathers into positive or negative types. The findings underscore that, in a matrilineal cultural context, paternal influence is best understood not in terms of magnitude or frequency, but in terms of symbolic persistence, selective relevance, and adolescents’ subjective interpretations. This culturally situated pattern distinguishes the present findings from studies conducted in patrilineal or nuclear-family contexts, where diminished paternal involvement is more readily equated with absence or deficit.

This study aimed to elucidate how adolescents construct and interpret fathers’ roles within the matrilineal Minangkabau cultural context, a kinship system in which descent, inheritance, and primary domestic authority are vested in the maternal line. By centering adolescents’ subjective accounts, the findings extend fatherhood research beyond behavioral indices of involvement and

Across thematic domains, fathers were consistently perceived as influential through indirect, non-directive, and morally oriented forms of involvement. Rather than occupying overtly authoritative or decision-dominant roles, fathers were described as moral companions, symbolic reference points, and sources of relational authorization. These findings resonate with contemporary conceptualizations of “soft” or “symbolic” paternal authority, in which influence is grounded in trust, moral legitimacy, and experiential wisdom rather than coercive control or structural power (Dermott & Miller, 2015; Pleck, 2010).

Importantly, the observed patterns of paternal involvement must be understood within the structural logic of Minangkabau matriliney. In matrilineal societies, fathers are often positioned at the periphery of formal kinship authority, while maternal uncles (*mamak*) and mothers assume central roles in lineage continuity and domestic governance (Kahn, 1976; Sanday, 2002). However, as ethnographic and psychological scholarship has emphasized, peripheral kinship authority does not equate to psychological or moral insignificance (Hewlett, 2017; Mattison et al., 2019). The present findings support this distinction by demonstrating that Minangkabau fathers maintain developmental relevance through symbolic and relational means, even in the absence of institutionalized power.

Adolescents’ accounts revealed that variations in paternal involvement were not evaluated in terms of positive–negative dichotomies. Instead, adolescents articulated differentiated meanings of paternal presence that were situationally contingent and culturally intelligible. For example, fathers’ non-directive guidance and respect for adolescents’ decision-making were interpreted as expressions of trust and recognition of autonomy, aligning with self-determination perspectives that emphasize autonomy support as a critical component of healthy adolescent development (Ryan & Deci, 2018; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). In this context, limited paternal intervention did not signify disengagement but reflected a culturally congruent balance between guidance and autonomy.

Similarly, adolescents framed paternal boundary-setting as moral protection rather than authoritarian restriction. This interpretation aligns with moral socialization theories that conceptualize parental influence as effective when boundaries are perceived as legitimate and relationally grounded (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). Within the Minangkabau context, such legitimacy appears to derive less from formal authority and more from personal integrity, consistency, and the preservation of familial trust (*amanah*), a value deeply embedded in Minangkabau moral philosophy (Navis, 1984; Sanday, 2002).

The theme of symbolic moral authority and epistemic trust further illustrates how adolescents attribute credibility to fathers’ guidance based on perceived experience and wisdom. This finding is consistent with research on epistemic trust in parent–child relationships, which highlights that adolescents are more likely to internalize parental values when parents are perceived as reliable, benevolent, and knowledgeable sources of guidance (Bo et al., 2017; Ensink et al., 2019). In matrilineal settings, where fathers’ authority is not structurally mandated, epistemic trust serves as a key mechanism sustaining paternal influence.

From a comparative perspective, the findings underscore both convergence and divergence between Minangkabau fathering and patterns observed in non-matrilineal societies. Similar paternal practices—such as providing advice, encouraging autonomy, or serving as moral exemplars—have been documented across diverse cultural contexts (Cabrera et al., 2018; M. E. Lamb & Lewis, 2013). However, the meaning and function of these practices differ markedly. In patrilineal or nuclear family systems, non-directive fathering is often interpreted as a deliberate parenting ideology or a shift toward egalitarian gender roles (Dermott, 2014; Doucet, 2013).

In contrast, within Minangkabau culture, such practices are embedded in a kinship system that structurally constrains paternal authority while simultaneously valuing fathers as moral figures.

This distinction challenges universalist assumptions in fatherhood research and highlights the risk of misclassifying culturally adaptive paternal roles as “low involvement” or “permissiveness” when evaluated using frameworks developed in non-matrilineal contexts (Bornstein, 2013; Keller, 2022). The present study demonstrates that paternal influence need not be direct or behaviorally intensive to be developmentally meaningful. Instead, influence may persist through symbolic continuity, moral exemplarity, and adolescents’ internalized reference to paternal values.

Moreover, adolescents’ narratives suggest that paternal influence may become increasingly implicit over time. Even when fathers were perceived as less involved in daily decision-making, adolescents often referenced internalized paternal principles when reflecting on choices and moral considerations. This pattern aligns with theories of internalization and guided autonomy, which posit that adequate parental socialization ultimately results in the transfer of regulatory functions from external guidance to internal moral frameworks (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010)

Collectively, these findings contribute to a culturally nuanced understanding of fatherhood by illustrating how paternal roles are reconfigured under matrilineal conditions. Rather than representing a weakened form of fathering, Minangkabau fatherhood emerges as a distinct relational model characterized by symbolic authority, moral presence, and situational engagement. This model underscores the importance of examining parenting within its cultural ecology and attending to adolescents’ subjective interpretations as central to understanding parental influence.

In conclusion, fathering in the Minangkabau context cannot be adequately captured by dominant models derived from patrilineal or Western nuclear family systems. While certain practices may appear superficially similar, their cultural meanings, relational functions, and developmental implications differ substantially. By grounding the analysis in adolescents’ meaning-making and situating the findings within the matrilineal kinship structure, this study advances fatherhood scholarship toward more culturally responsive and theoretically integrative frameworks.

CONCLUSION

This research explored how adolescents in a matrilineal Minangkabau society perceive and interpret their fathers’ roles in decision-making and stress management. Instead of viewing paternal involvement as uniform or solely outcome-focused, the results reveal diverse ways adolescents understand their fathers’ presence, guidance, and moral stance within daily family dynamics. Across the themes identified, fathers were not seen as main decision-makers but rather as relational figures whose influence was expressed through moral companionship, conditional trust, boundaries grounded in care, symbolic authority, and, occasionally, through repositioned or diminished involvement.

The findings demonstrate contextual patterns of significance, in which the father’s role is perceived as adaptable, situation-dependent, and relationally negotiated. Variations in perceived paternal influence mirror differences in interactional dynamics, decision-making domains, and culturally ingrained expectations, rather than unstable paternal characteristics. This perspective elucidates that adolescents do not inherently interpret reduced or indirect paternal involvement as absence or dysfunction; instead, it may be seen as consistent with culturally normative role distributions.

Within the Minangkabau matrilineal system, these findings underscore a distinctive configuration of paternity. Although lineage, property, and daily caregiving are structurally centered on mothers and maternal kin, fathers remain salient moral and relational reference points in adolescents' accounts. Their influence is exerted less through formal authority and more through symbolic presence, experiential wisdom, and relational authorization. Adolescents describe fathers as figures whose trust, advice, and moral stance continue to inform evaluative reasoning, even when mothers or maternal relatives are more prominently involved in daily decision-making. This finding emphasizes that paternal roles in Minangkabau families are not supplanted by kin figures but are negotiated within a culturally specific ecology of shared caregiving and moral responsibility.

From a comparative perspective, this study advances fatherhood research by showing that paternal roles in matrilineal societies cannot be fully understood through models based primarily on patrilineal or nuclear-family settings. Although some relational patterns, like supporting autonomy or providing moral guidance, may appear similar to those in other cultures, their meanings and roles change within a matrilineal context. Here, paternal influence primarily operates symbolically and relationally, shaping adolescents' feelings of legitimacy, responsibility, and moral values rather than exercising control or making decisions.

This study's main academic contribution is defining father involvement as a culturally embedded, meaning-driven process within a matrilineal environment. By highlighting adolescents' viewpoints, the results enhance understanding of how fathers continue to play a vital role in family life not by replacing maternal roles, but through negotiated, need-supporting caregiving that aligns with cultural norms and relational expectations. This idea advances cross-cultural theories of fatherhood by focusing on both what fathers do and how their roles are perceived and valued across different sociocultural contexts.

Several limitations should be considered. The dependence on adolescents' self-reports means there is no triangulation with fathers' or mothers' viewpoints, and the sample is limited to adolescents living with both biological parents in West Sumatra. Future studies would benefit from using multi-informant, longitudinal methods to examine how paternal roles are negotiated over time and across different family structures, including nonresident or migrant fathers. Nonetheless, the current results provide a detailed perspective on fathering within a matrilineal context and highlight the value of culturally sensitive, interpretive approaches to understanding parental involvement in adolescent development.

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