Communication Strategies of Mothers as Single Parents in Socializing Life Values to Children
(A Study of Fatherless Families)

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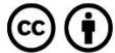wirdadelima4004233013@uinsu.ac.id*

ABSTRACT: The increasing prevalence of fatherless families in urban Indonesian contexts presents significant challenges for the transmission of life values and social norms to children, particularly as mothers assume dual parental roles amid persistent social stigma. This qualitative research with a phenomenological approach aims to analyze the communication strategies implemented by single mothers in socializing life values to children within the context of fatherless families in Medan City, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 female heads of households and participant observation, then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The research findings reveal five main communication strategies: first, androgynous communication strategies that contextually integrate feminine (empathetic and dialogic) and masculine (firm and directive) characteristics; second, the construction of compensatory communication networks by involving significant male figures from extended families and communities; third, synergistic integration of verbal and non-verbal communication through behavioral modeling and reflection; fourth, creative adaptation of local cultural values (*dalihan na tolu* and *musyawarah*) modified according to the fatherless family structure; and fifth, the development of resistance narratives against social stigma through the construction of positive family identity. This study concludes that the success of value socialization in fatherless families highly depends on the mother's ability to develop resilient, contextual communication strategies integrated with the sociocultural environment. These findings highlight the importance of developing support models for fatherless families that are grounded in existing strengths and local sociocultural potentials.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of fatherlessness has emerged as a significant global social issue over the past few decades, including within Indonesian society (Ashari, 2018). Data from the Central Statistics Agency indicate a consistent increase in the proportion of households headed by women, reaching 15.2% of total households nationwide. In Medan City, this phenomenon is further complicated by rapid urbanization, family structural transformation, economic pressures, and the weakening of traditional family institutions (Irhamna & Faridy, 2024). These dynamics place fatherless families in a particularly vulnerable position within the urban social landscape.

The absence of a father figure creates structural gaps in the parenting system, compelling mothers to simultaneously assume the dual roles of primary caregiver and economic provider (Febriani & Iswinarti, 2025). Amato (2020) argues that this dual burden often generates role strain, which significantly affects parenting capacity and intra-family communication patterns. Single mothers not only face economic challenges but also encounter difficulties in transmitting life values to children without the presence of a supportive partner (Taufik & Utami, 2025).

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) emphasizes the importance of multiple role models in children's development. In fatherless families, the responsibility for role modeling is concentrated almost entirely on the mother (Mahendra & Rahayu, 2024). This condition demands adaptive and comprehensive communication strategies to ensure the effective internalization of values, despite limitations in parenting resources and authority (Indah et al., 2025). Previous studies have identified heightened psychosocial vulnerabilities among children from fatherless families, including challenges in moral development and gender identity formation (Wilke & Baker, 2025). However, existing research has not sufficiently explored the communicative mechanisms that function as protective factors in this context.

Family communication within single-parent households undergoes a fundamental transformation. Family communication patterns theory suggests that such families often develop more conversation-oriented communication, characterized by increased dialogue and flexibility, while still maintaining parental authority (Roman et al., 2025). In this study, life values are conceptualized based on Schwartz's (2012) value framework, encompassing moral (honesty, integrity), spiritual (religiosity, meaning in life), social (empathy, cooperation), and independence-related values (responsibility, initiative). These dimensions represent the foundational pillars of character education as articulated (Utami & Yusran, 2025).

The socio-cultural context of Medan as a multi-ethnic urban center adds further complexity. As noted by Lubis (2021), strong kinship systems shape societal perceptions of fatherless families and influence the effectiveness of maternal communication strategies. Mothers are therefore required to selectively adapt traditional cultural values to suit the realities of modern fatherless family structures. McCubbin's (2011) Family Stress Theory provides a useful lens for understanding how such families develop coping mechanisms in response to structural pressures.

In this context, communication functions not only as a socialization tool but also as a central mechanism for building family resilience (Arif, 2025). McLanahan (2009) highlights the existence of social capital deficits in fatherless families, wherein children lose access to authority, economic stability, and social guidance traditionally provided by fathers. This condition contributes to what Popenoe (2009) terms "father hunger" which has long-term implications for children's psychosocial development. Recent findings by Wilcox (2022) further reveal a tendency toward forced early maturity among children in fatherless families, often manifesting as parentification.

Compensatory Communication Theory offers a valuable framework for understanding how mothers strategically compensate for the absence of a father figure through intensified communication, expanded interaction networks, and the involvement of significant others (Camilleri & Sammut, 2025). Effective socialization relies on modeling, reinforcement, and interactive dialogue mechanisms that, in fatherless families, must be optimized almost exclusively by mothers (Utami et al., 2023). Value Transmission Theory further identifies consistency, emotional closeness, and clarity of expectations as critical determinants of successful value socialization, all of which pose heightened challenges in single-mother households. From a feminist perspective, Dow highlights how single mothers actively negotiate and reinterpret their dual roles amid structural constraints (Axpe et al., 2019). This study also adopts Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Ecological Systems Theory to examine interactions between micro-level communication processes and macro-level sociocultural influences shaping value socialization.

Despite the growing prevalence of fatherless families in Indonesia, empirical research examining how single mothers strategically communicate life values to their children remains limited. Existing studies tend to emphasize deficits and risks, while insufficiently addressing the adaptive strengths and communicative resilience that mothers develop. There is a notable gap in understanding communication as a protective and empowering mechanism within fatherless family systems, particularly in culturally diverse urban contexts such as Medan.

This study is therefore necessary to provide an in-depth, phenomenological understanding of mothers' lived experiences in developing communication strategies that support value socialization amid structural limitations. By integrating family communication theory, value socialization frameworks, and cultural perspectives, this research makes significant contributions to both theoretical advancements and the design of practical interventions for fatherless families in Indonesia.

METHODS
Design
Study this qualitative approach with a phenomenology design to understand the essence of the experience of mothers as single parents in constructing a communication strategy (Christou, 2023). Creswell (2018) The phenomenological approach was chosen because his abilities reveal meaning deep from the experience of life in a natural context (Nii Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023).

Participants
Research conducted in Medan City during six months involved 15 selected participants through a purposive sampling technique based on specific criteria, including status as a single parent with a minimum of three years and having a child aged 12-24 years. Election locus. This is based on characteristics of Medan's unique socio-demographics as a metropolitan city with diverse ethnicities (Ahmed, 2024).

Instruments
Data collection was carried out through triangulation methods that included in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and study documentation (Naeem et al., 2023). The interview focused on the mother's personal experience in developing a communication strategy, while the observation of participants was done to observe the interaction and communication between the mother and child in a natural setting. Triangulation is a crucial method for ensuring the depth and validity of data in qualitative studies. Every interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim, then analyzed using thematic models Braun & Clarke (2006) through a six-stage systematic process, which includes familiarizing oneself with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing reports (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Data Analysis
Data analysis was performed in a way literative with NVivo 12 software assistance to ensure traceability and thematic validity. The analysis process began by reading the transcript repeatedly to identify patterns of communication that emerged and then grouping them into thematic codes. According to Braun & Clarke (2006) the analysis, thematic analysis allows researchers to identify, analyze, and report patterns within data in a systematic manner. The theme review stage is conducted through peer debriefing discussions to ensure consistency in data interpretation, while member checking is performed to verify the accuracy of findings with participants.

Data validity is maintained through four criteria Lincoln & Guba (1985) , which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was confirmed through triangulation of sources and methods, while transferability was ensured with a detailed description

of the context and a thick description. A strict audit trail is implemented to ensure dependability, whereas reflexivity is implemented by researchers to guard against confirmability. The Aspect ethics study was conducted in accordance with informed consent, confidentiality, and identity ethics guidelines approved by the university research committee prior to data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results
Socialized Life Values

In the context of a *fatherless family* in Medan, socialization values life through the mother. Parenting is not just a routine task, but also a strategic response to the absence of a father figure. The mother does not bring enough answers to ensure that the children grow into individuals with well-rounded characters, even in families that are considered "incomplete" by society (Baferani, 2015). This socialization process provides a crucial foundation for children to develop a moral framework and resilience in the face of life's challenges. This study aims to map the landscape of values prioritized by mothers, representing their efforts to compensate for the void left by their fathers.

First, moral and religious values emerge as the most dominant foundations that are socialized. Mothers in Medan, a society known for its strong emphasis on religious values, place a strong emphasis on honesty, integrity, and respect for others, with these values as the primary focus of their religious teachings. This is often conveyed through the practice of religious rituals, stories of prophets or role models, and advice that directly connects every action to consequences before God. This aspect of religious strengthening serves as both a moral guideline and a coping mechanism, enabling children to sincerely understand and accept their family's condition (Susilawati et al., 2025). In an environment full of social control, having children who are well-behaved, polite, and religious is also a form of social responsibility for a mother.

Second, social values and empathy also received significant attention. Mothers recognized that children from fatherless families tended to experience social isolation or difficulty forming healthy relationships. Therefore, they actively teach the importance of working together, sharing, caring for friends who are experiencing difficulties, and the ability to understand other people's feelings (empathy) (Elsayed, 2024). This socialization is often carried out through interactions within the extended family, which is generally strong in Medan and the Batak and Medan Malay cultures, particularly with neighbors. Mothers encourage their children to participate in community activities while continuing to emphasize the importance of building positive relationships as a form of social capital for the future.

Third, as practical and contextual needs arise, inadequate values, responsibility, and independence become unfocused and unavoidable. Mothers as single parents often have to work to earn a living, so children, especially teenagers, are encouraged to take care of themselves and help with household chores. This socialization is carried out by assigning clear household tasks, teaching pocket money management, and encouraging initiative in solving problems at school without relying too heavily on their mothers. The goal of this learning is to shape children into individuals who can stand on their own two feet and not become a burden to others, which is a major concern for many mothers in this situation.

Fourth, valuing resilience and optimism in a specific, socialized way fosters a resilient mentality in children. Mothers understand that their children will face various challenges, from painful questions about their father to environmental stigma. To that end, they try to build a positive narrative about life, emphasizing that difficulties are not the end of everything, and that they, as mothers, will always be there for their children. The instilled value of optimism encourages children to look to the future with hope and gratitude for the positive things they still have. This process aims to build resilience in children, enabling them to avoid becoming easily discouraged.

Fifth, while there are not always explicit values about gender equality and respect, many women also internalize these through the process of socialization. A mother who becomes submissive and makes the decision to live alone, in a way that does not directly break traditional gender stereotypes. They often emphasize to their children, both boys and girls, the importance of mutual respect and that domestic roles are not enough for women alone. For men who have children, this view is more egalitarian towards women, while for women who still have children, it builds confidence about their independence and potential.

Mothers in Medan act as the primary filters of values, particularly selecting values that can replace the role of fathers.

> *"…People look at us with pity because there is no man in the house. So, I tell my daughter, 'You must be twice as smart and twice as polite.' I want her character to be so strong that no one can say she is 'damaged' because she has no father…"* (S., 42, Batak Mother).

This mapping demonstrates that socialization values are not isolated entities, but rather interconnected networks. Religious values strengthen morals, independence values support resilience, and empathy values strengthen children's social networks. Medan's collective cultural and religious context also shapes the values of this election, where maintaining the family's good name and the child's ability to integrate with the wider community are important considerations.

Socialization in fatherless families in Medan is a deliberate and multidimensional construct. Mothers don't simply transmit generic values but strategically select and emphasize values that can serve as "shields" and "guides" for their children to overcome the structural vulnerabilities they face. Through this strategy, mothers strive to ensure that fatherlessness does not hinder their children from growing into moral, resilient, and functional individuals within society.

Forms and Methods of Communication Strategy Used

The process of socializing life values in families without fathers does not occur in an empty room, but rather through communication strategies consciously chosen by the mother as the primary educator. These strategies develop in response to the dual challenges of the absence of a partner in parenting and the accompanying social stress. In this context, mothers are not simply conveying messages, but also framing and repeating their family's reality through purposeful communication patterns that build children's resilience (Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1994). This study aims to describe the various forms and methods of communication applied, which reflect the creative adaptation of mothers in their dual roles.

First, Direct communication through verbal advice and instructions is the most common method. Mothers tend to use specific moments, such as before bed or dinner, to provide clear and explicit guidance on values like honesty, responsibility, and respect for others. A one-way form of communication. This is often driven by the need to provide clear moral guidance in the absence of a father figure. According to Fitzpatrick (2004) in families lacking traditional structure, communication tends to be concept-oriented. This is used to encourage children to discuss their thoughts and beliefs, although in practice it is often more instructive.

Second, as a counterbalance, indirect communication through modeling plays a crucial role. Mothers realize that actions speak louder than words. By consistently demonstrating honesty, hard work, and resilience in the face of life's challenges, they establish themselves as role models for their children. This process involves the children observing and imitating their mothers' behavior. This is a highly effective social learning mechanism. In the absence of a father, children see their mothers not simply as caregivers, but as living proof of how to survive and consistently live life's values.

Third, narrative communication through storytelling is a powerful tool for conveying complex values. Mothers use folktales, religious stories, personal experiences, or even metaphors to teach life lessons. This method allows children to absorb values without feeling condescension. For example, a mother possibly tells her struggling grandfather to teach her mark abstinence and give up. Research on African American families, many of whom experience a structured family as a single *parent*, shows that narrative family functioning conveys an inheritance culture, instilling racial pride, and teaches coping strategies for difficulties. A phenomenon similar to that seen in the context of a collective culture in Medan.

Fourth, participatory communication, which involves dialogue and discussion, is also applied, although it may be more challenging. Some mothers try to create a democratic space where children are invited to discuss the problems they face, share their feelings, and work together to find solutions. This communication style is categorized as an authoritative parenting pattern, designed to foster independent thinking and a sense of internal responsibility in children. In families without fathers, this approach helps children, especially teenagers, feel that their opinions are valued and that they are involved in the family decision-making process, which in turn strengthens the bond between mother and child.

Fifth, Communication through habits and routines forms the foundation of social values. Mothers instill discipline, responsibility, and cooperation by involving their children in structured household routines. Routine tasks such as cleaning the room, washing the dishes, or organizing study schedules are forms of non-verbal communication that teach insufficient answers. Through consistent participation in household chores, children learn about rights and obligations, contributions, and the meaning of family life, albeit in an "incomplete" form. These routines provide a sense of stability and predictability that children desperately need in times of stress.

Sixth, the use of media and technology is starting to be integrated as additional communication channels. Mothers use films, stories on YouTube, or social media posts containing moral messages as discussion material with children. They select relevant content and then discuss the characters, conflicts, and solutions presented, so that life values are filtered and contextualized through modern media. This approach aligns with parental mediation theory, which posits that parents actively interpret media content for their children.

Seventh, Emotional and affective communication is the common thread that connects all the above methods. In families without a father, the mother often must also provide emotional support. They use affectionate communication, hugs, and feelings of validation to build a sense of psychological security in the child. Emotional support. This is a requirement for messages to be well-received by the other party. A child who feels loved and supported will be more open to the socializing influence of their mother. When dealing with a child's difficult questions about their father, sensitive, affective communication is key.

Eighth, Analysis of these communication patterns shows that mothers generally adopt a contextual and flexible communication style. They are not fixed to one style, but rather alternate between being instructors, advisors, storytellers, and discussion partners, depending on the situation, the child's age, and the specific values you wish to convey. Flexibility is a competency developed through communication as a form of adaptation to the demands of their dual roles. The ability to switch roles in communication demonstrates their sophistication and resilience as single parents.

Mothers' communication strategies in fatherless families in Medan are a rich and multidimensional repertoire. They skillfully combine direct and indirect methods, harness the power of narrative and routine, and do not limit themselves to modern media. Through adaptive, child-centered communication, they not only convey values but also construct a meaningful, resilient, and loving family reality that overcomes the narrative deficit often inherent in *fatherless* families. The communication is multidimensional, moving between strict instruction and emotional bonding.

*"…I'm not just talking. I pointed out. When they saw me coming home late
at night and still praying, they understood what 'integrity' meant without me
saying a word. That's my 'silent' advice..."* (M., 38, Malay Mother).

Challenges and Obstacles Faced by Mothers as Single Parents in Socializing Life Values

The socialization process in the context of fatherless families in Medan does not run smoothly but is colored by a series of complex and multidimensional challenges. As a single mother, one has to negotiate not only with internal burdens but also with external pressures from the social environment. These challenges often shape and limit the communication strategies they can employ, creating a dynamic filled with compromise and tension. Understanding these obstacles in depth is essential to appreciating the efforts and heroic deeds undertaken by mothers in carrying out their dual roles.

Psychological and emotional challenges are the most fundamental obstacles faced by mothers. They often experience mental exhaustion from having to shoulder the overwhelming responsibilities of parenting alone, while still grappling with feelings of failure, loneliness, and worry about their child's future. Chronic stress can reduce their psychological ability to communicate in a patient and consistent manner with children. A wise mother may understand the importance of patience, but in a state of emotional exhaustion, she may react impulsively to her child's naughtiness. Thus, this emotional burden directly erodes the foundation necessary for effective and valuable socialization. Psychological fatigue and economic "time scarcity" are the biggest obstacles to effective socialization.

*"...The hardest part is when they ask, 'Where is Papa?' My heart breaks, but
I have to stay calm. Sometimes I am so tired from working that I just snap at
them. Later, I regret it because I know they need my warmth, not my anger…"*
(R., 35, Javanese-Medan Mother).

Limitations of time and physical energy are almost universal barriers to practice. Most mothers in fatherless families also act as breadwinners outside the home, which forces them to spend a lot of time and energy outside the home. The conflict between work demands and childcare needs creates a very limited "scarcity" of time. As a result, quality communication moments, such as in-depth conversations or shared activities, often get eroded. Mothers are forced to rely on quick, instructive, and versatile communication, instead of a participatory approach that takes longer but is more effective in instilling signs. Life values that should be conveyed through example and dialogue are ultimately reduced to mere commands and prohibitions.

Difficulty in handling topic-sensitive issues, especially in relation to the absence of a father, is a unique challenge to communication. As children grow older, they will naturally question the reasons for their father's absence. Mothers are often trapped in a dilemma between saying the possible truth , which is painful, covering the fact to protect the child, or looking for a narrative that can be accepted. Other topics such as education, sexuality, and development, gender identity, which in a family, may not be fully answered together, are now fully on the shoulders of the mother. Difficulty. This is often exacerbated by a lack of preparation and resources. Power. To discuss topics in an appropriate way for a child of that age.

Social pressure and stigma from the environment around participants burden the socialization process value. Inside a public collective like Medan, families who are considered "not complete" often become material gossip or objects of poverty. This stigma can manifest in the form of cornering questions from family, big or neighbors, such as blaming the Mother for the child's mischief with the narrative "because his father is not there". This pressure forces mothers not only

to socialize values but also to constantly prove to the public that they are successful in doing so, thus creating an additional performance burden. Socialization becomes a supervised public performance, rather than an intimate process between mother and child.

Limited resources, economic strength also directly affect the mother's ability to value certain implants. The inability to meet a child's material needs can hinder socialization, such as a sense of security and optimism about the future. For example, the intention to teach in higher education may be hampered by a lack of funds for additional lessons or books. Poverty also limits access to better residential environments and socialization, which could actually make them partners in the socialization process. Thus, the economic challenges are not only material, but also in the symbolic boundaries of the movement of the mother's space in shaping the world of children's values.

The lack of systemic support and alternative role models is particularly pronounced in the socialization process for boys. The mother found it difficult to project a positive masculine image and be a role model for the boy who would grow up. The absence of a father figure creates a void in a child's understanding of healthy gender roles. While extended family can help, often this help is inconsistent or does not completely replace a father's presence. Mothers have to work harder to find and introduce substitute role models, such as uncles, grandparents, or teachers, who can help instill certain values that they find more difficult to teach themselves.

Overall, the challenges faced by mothers in fatherless families in Medan are interrelated and reinforce each other. Economic pressures make things worse, causing emotional stress, which in turn reduces the quality of communication and ultimately leads to more ongoing stigma from society. This chain of problems shows that the socialization of efforts can never be separated from a more structural context, namely, the breadth of ties that bind mothers. Therefore, any intervention or support for fatherless families must be holistic, focusing not only on parenting techniques but also on economic empowerment, mental support, and campaigns to combat social stigma to create a better support ecosystem.

Impact of Communication Strategy on Child Development

The communication strategies implemented by mothers as single parents not only focus on conveying messages but also have a profound and long-term impact on the child's psychological and social development. In the context of fatherless families in Medan, where children face the risk of disconnection and social stigma, quality communication between mother and child plays a crucial protective role. The communication patterns applied in a consistent way will form a framework of reference for the child to look at themselves, their family, and the social world around them. Analysis impact. This is important for understanding what a specific communication strategy is, which can mitigate structural issues faced by families without fathers.

First, the impact on internalization values and formation character. Children who experience consistent, full communication, love, and accompanied modeling tend to show internalization of values for a better life and strong character. When a person Mother Not only order child for honestly, but also in an open confess his mistake alone, child learn integrity as living values. In contrast, communication dominated by instructions without accompanied by explanation rational (one-way communication) can produce compliance that is external and temporary, not deep internalization. Research Grusec & Goodnow (1994) shows that the accuracy of reception of parental messages and acceptance of messages by children is greatly influenced by the warmth of the relationship and the clarity of delivery. In the Medan context, collective values such as respecting parents and being responsible for the family can be internalized well if conveyed through stories and real examples in the extended family.

Second, the impact on skills, social, and interpersonal competence. Children from families without fathers whose mothers practice participatory communication by listening a lot and giving space for children to express their opinions will develop better communication and empathy skills.

They used to express feelings and considerations, considering other people's views, which is the foundation for healthy relationships outside the home. On the other hand, if communication is closed and the child avoids emotionally related topics, such as the absence of the father, the child can grow with difficulty in building intimacy and trust in friendship. According to Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory, quality communication between a responsive mother and child forms an *"internal working model"* in children about how relationships with other people should be built , which will be brought until maturity.

Third, the impact on resilience and mental health. Communication strategies that focus on developing a narrative, positive and optimistic, have proven to be a strong support for healthy psychological development in children. A capable mother discusses challenging life as something that can be overcome, instead of as a misfortune, and helps the child develop an optimistic *"explanatory style"*. This contributes to the resilience or mental resilience of children. A study Masten (2011) found that family support, as seen through warm and cohesive communication, is one of the strongest protective factors for children growing up in adversity. In Medan, where social pressures on fatherless families are particularly high, the mother's ability to communicate in a calming and reassuring manner, such as saying *"our family is fine,"* plays a crucial role as a psychological shield for the child.

Fourth, the impact on academic performance and motivation for achievement. A mother who emphasizes mark not quite enough responsibility and independence, as well as showing high expectations for education, correlated positively with academic performance. When the mother is involved in communication about the (target) school, help the child arrange time, and appreciate the process more than just results, things that build motivation in the child for studying. On the contrary, economic pressure and time constraints often limit mothers ' capacity they for involved in supportive academic communication, which can result in a decline in school performance. Research Hill & Tyson (2009) confirms that parental involvement in form communication about academic aspirations and discussion about school experience is a strong predictor of academic success for children, including in single-parent families.

Fifth, the impact on gender identity and the concept of self. The challenge unique in a family without a father is the formation of identity, especially for male children. Mothers who are proactive and open about positive gender roles, as well as introduce a good male figure from their environment (such as an uncle, grandfather, or teacher), can help their child develop a healthy masculinity. Communication that avoids topics such as this or is filled with hatred of the father figure can cause confusion and identity issues in children. On the other hand, girls, through communication with strong and independent mothers, can develop a strong and firm self-confidence, which does not depend on external validation. Research Risman (2004) demonstrates that gender socialization is an interactional process and that in the absence of fathers, mothers can creatively use powerful communication resources to provide a balanced understanding of gender roles. Quality communication acts as a protective shield against the *"deficit narrative"* often associated with fatherless homes.

> *"…My eldest son now helps his younger siblings with their homework without being asked. He says, 'I'm the head of the household now, Mak.' This shows that he has grasped the responsibility I've always talked about…"* (L., 45, Mother).

Overall, the impact of mothers' communication strategies in *fatherless* families in Medan is multidimensional and interrelated. Effective communication not only instills values but also provides children with the psychological and social tools to navigate life. The structural limitations in *fatherless* families can be offset by the warm, open, and empowering quality of communication

in the mother-daughter relationship. These findings underscore that the focus of social interventions should not only be on meeting the material needs of families, but also on improving mothers' communication capacities, as this is a long-term investment for the well-being of future generations.

Role of the Environment Medan Social and Cultural

Communication strategies developed by mothers in families without fathers in Medan cannot be separated from the contextual environment, social, and cultural where they are in Medan City, with characteristics of its society that is multiethnic, religious, and upholds superior collectivism, creating an ecosystem that can simultaneously become a source of support and pressure. This environment functions as an "audience" that observes, a "partner" that helps, and also a "judge" who assesses the effectiveness of the care provided by the single mother. Analysis This reveals how factors external to the forming, limiting, and sometimes facilitating signs of the socialization process.

First, the role of the family is that of a large (*extended) family* as the primary system supporter. In Medan's strong Batak, Malay, and Javanese cultures, the family's older siblings (grandparents, uncles, aunts) often come along as well as in the process of care. Presence, they create a network, enriching multi-generational communication, socialization, and valuing children. An uncle can become a figure man substitute (*father figure*) who instills certain values in his nephew, while grandma can share local wisdom through stories and fairy tales. This support practically relieves the burden on mothers, giving they room to psychologically communicate with patients more reflectively. A study by (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994) confirms that support from a big family can, in a significant way, mitigate the negative impact of growing up in a single-parent family. The "Extended Family" (*Keluarga Besar*) and religious institutions provide a unique structural safety net in the Medan context.

> *"…In Medan, you are never truly alone. My brother (the children's uncle) takes the boys to the Mosque. The neighbors also report to me if they see my kids playing too late. It takes a whole 'gang' (community) to raise them here…"* (H., 50, Batak Mother).

Second, the religious community is a source of values and moral support. Medan is a city with strong religious beliefs. Mosques, churches, and temples are often used as the center of a community. For many single mothers, this community provides a framework of values that has become so important and a structured social environment for their children. The mother took advantage of religious activities, such as religious studies or school weeks, as partners in instilling moral and spiritual values. Religious teachers or leaders often made references to address complex moral questions that are perceived as difficult to answer. The community religious function as "family", this "replacement" is in line with findings Putnam (2000) about the importance of "social capital" in forming cohesive social networks for welfare individuals and families.

Third, the pressure of collective norms and social stigma. On the other hand, the cultural collective in Medan also brings a burden independently. Society has high expectations of children's politeness and obedience. Every behavior deviation in a child from a family without a father *is* often associated with the "incompleteness" of his family and blamed on the mother. This stigma creates what Goffman (1963 called "*identity spoilage*", where mothers feel continuously monitored and assessed. This pressure can encourage mothers to implement more effective, authoritarian, and repressive communication strategies in socialization, with the main aim of controlling children's behavior so that they do not become the subject of gossip but rather focus on understanding and internalizing values .

Fourth, values culture specifics that affect content communication. Values culture local, such as "*hamoraon, hagabeon, hasangapon*" (wealth, lineage, honor) in Batak culture, or values of "respect" and "consideration" in the culture Malay and Javanese, respectively, are finely integrated into messages conveyed by mothers. A Batak mother may emphasize the importance of achieving "*hasangapon*" (honor) through academic and behavioral commendation as a form of service to a big family. The mother of culture, Malay, will emphasize polite and non-confrontational communication, as well as confrontational communication. Thus, the communication strategies and values socialized not only respond to the condition of fatherlessness but also embody a broader cultural heritage.

Fifth, the environment, settlements, and neighbors contribute to socialization in the room. The characteristics of the residential environment, whether it is a densely populated village or a modern housing complex, also shape communication patterns. In the interactive village environment, children have many role models, including neighbors and safe spaces, to interact socially. Mothers can utilize their neighbors' network to supervise and guide their children. On the other hand, in a more individualistic environment, social pressure may be reduced, but mothers also lose this source of informal support. Mothers in such neighborhoods need to be more intensive and planned in creating social networks for their children, which requires extra business communication and initiative.

Overall, Medan's social and cultural environment serves as the stage for a communication drama about mothers and children in a fatherless family. This drama is being staged. He provides a script (values culture), players, supporters (a big family and a religious community), and at the same time, critics (social stigma). The success of a mother's communication strategy depends not only on personal competence but also on her ability to navigate, utilize, and sometimes challenge the existing socio-cultural ecosystem. This holistic understanding leads to the conclusion that efforts to empower *fatherless* families must involve a broad community approach, including public education to reduce stigma and empowerment of social institutions that can act as positive parenting partners.

These five points are interrelated and will provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of communication in families without fathers and how life values are transferred from mothers to children in the context of the city of Medan.

Discussion
Communication Strategies and Value Socialization in Fatherless Families

This study demonstrates that communication within fatherless families in Medan operates not as a compensatory mechanism for parental absence, but as a strategic and generative process through which mothers actively construct values, authority, and resilience. The findings challenge deficit-oriented perspectives on fatherlessness and highlight the central role of maternal communication in shaping children's moral and psychosocial development. The findings reveal that mothers in fatherless households do not transmit values in a passive or uniform manner. Instead, they intentionally construct a hierarchized value system that combines moral–religious foundations with instrumental values such as independence, responsibility, and perseverance. This configuration functions as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), equipping children to navigate social environments that often marginalize non-normative family structures.

To transmit these values effectively, mothers employ adaptive and hybrid communication patterns. Authority and emotional intimacy are not positioned as opposing forces but are integrated fluidly according to situational needs. Mothers alternate between directive communication to establish boundaries and dialogic interaction to foster emotional security. This dynamic expands Baumrind's (1991) authoritative parenting model by demonstrating that, in the absence of a father, communication styles must remain flexible and context-sensitive rather than fixed. Thus, the mother's role evolves into a multifaceted communicative function that simultaneously regulates

behavior, provides emotional support, and reinforces the internalization of values. Moreover, behavioral modeling and consistency between verbal messages and daily practices emerge as critical mechanisms of value socialization. In line with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), children observe and internalize values not only through instruction but through the mother's visible resilience and ethical conduct. This coherence strengthens trust and facilitates deeper internalization of life values.

Narrative, Spiritual, and Socio-Cultural Mediation of Resilience

Beyond direct instruction, mothers rely heavily on narrative and spiritual communication to construct meaning and resilience. Storytelling functions as a mechanism of narrative reconstruction, enabling mothers to reinterpret fatherlessness as a condition of strength, endurance, and moral responsibility rather than deprivation. Through these narratives, children are encouraged to develop a positive family identity that counters dominant social discourses of "broken homes." This process aligns with McAdams' (2001) concept of narrative identity, where personal stories become foundational to psychological coherence and self-worth.

Spiritual communication further reinforces resilience by positioning religiosity as a source of emotional security and existential meaning. In Medan's religious socio-cultural context, references to divine protection and guidance operate as a form of transcendental coping, providing children with a stable sense of attachment that mitigates the absence of a paternal figure. Thus, spirituality becomes an integral communication resource that supports long-term psychological stability, not just a mere ritual practice.

These communication strategies are mediated by Medan's collectivist culture, which simultaneously offers support and imposes normative pressure. Extended family networks and community institutions provide social capital and alternative role models, enhancing maternal efforts in value socialization. However, heightened social surveillance also compels mothers to intensify moral discipline and communicative control in order to protect their family's reputation. This dual role of culture confirms Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, emphasizing how macro- and meso-level contexts shape micro-level family communication.

Implications

Theoretically, this study reconceptualizes fatherless families as sites of intensified communicative agency, rather than as sites of socialization deficits. Practically, the findings suggest that policy and intervention programs should focus on empowering maternal communication skills, reducing social stigma, and mobilizing community institutions as supportive partners.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Limitations include the study's primary focus on maternal perspectives and a sample dominated by middle-to-lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Future research should incorporate children's voices, comparative cultural settings, and longitudinal approaches to examine the sustainability of these communication strategies over time.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that communication strategies developed by mothers in fatherless families in Medan City go beyond just delivering a message, functioning instead as multidimensional processes of meaning-making and resilience construction. Mothers act as active architects of family resilience by designing structured value configurations, employing hybrid and role-switching communication patterns, and utilizing narrative as well as spiritual–transcendental communication to compensate for the absence of a father figure and to protect children from potential psychosocial risks. These findings shift the prevailing paradigm from viewing fatherless families as deficit entities

to recognizing them as empowered and adaptive family units. Theoretically, the study underscores the need for more inclusive and context-sensitive family communication models, while practically it highlights the importance of empowerment programs that strengthen maternal communication capacities, community support systems, and public awareness initiatives aimed at reducing stigma.

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