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# Interpersonal Communication Among Single-Parent Fathers in Shaping Parenting on Social Development in Denai Village, Medan City

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### ABSTRACT

*Interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in parenting, especially for fathers who act as single parents. This study aims to explore how dyadic interpersonal communication between single fathers and their children shapes a parenting style that fosters social development in children living in Denai Subdistrict, Medan City. Using a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The research involved single fathers and their children as primary and additional informants to gain a comprehensive understanding of their communication dynamics. The findings indicate that dyadic interpersonal communication serves as the foundation for implementing a democratic parenting style. Fathers provide their children with the freedom to make independent decisions while offering guidance, support, and motivation. The communication pattern prioritizes openness, mutual understanding, and strong emotional support, allowing children to feel heard and valued. Furthermore, single fathers must assume multiple roles—not only as financial providers but also as caregivers who offer emotional and moral guidance. The ability to balance these responsibilities significantly impacts the child's overall development. The success of this parenting approach is reflected in the child's positive social growth, including their ability to engage with their surroundings, express empathy, and develop a sense of responsibility in everyday life. A structured and empathetic communication approach helps children build confidence and develop essential social skills. Therefore, this study emphasizes that interpersonal communication between single fathers and their children is not merely a parenting tool but also a crucial mechanism for shaping children's character and personality.*

**Keyword:** *Interpersonal communication, single father, democratic parenting, social development*

### ABSTRAK

Komunikasi interpersonal memainkan peran penting dalam pola asuh, terutama bagi ayah yang menjalankan peran sebagai orang tua tunggal. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana komunikasi interpersonal diadik antara ayah single-parent dan anaknya membentuk pola asuh yang mendukung perkembangan sosial anak di Kelurahan Denai, Kota Medan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, serta dokumentasi. Penelitian ini melibatkan ayah tunggal dan anak-anaknya sebagai informan utama dan tambahan guna memperoleh pemahaman yang komprehensif mengenai dinamika komunikasi mereka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi interpersonal diadik menjadi landasan utama dalam penerapan pola asuh demokratis. Ayah memberikan kebebasan



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kepada anak untuk mengambil keputusan sendiri, sambil tetap memberikan bimbingan, dukungan, dan motivasi. Pola komunikasi yang diterapkan menekankan keterbukaan, saling pengertian, serta dukungan emosional yang kuat, sehingga anak merasa dihargai dan didengar. Selain itu, seorang ayah yang menjadi orang tua tunggal harus menjalankan berbagai peran—tidak hanya sebagai pencari nafkah, tetapi juga sebagai pengasuh yang memberikan bimbingan emosional dan moral. Kemampuan ayah dalam menyeimbangkan tanggung jawab ini sangat berpengaruh terhadap perkembangan anak secara keseluruhan. Keberhasilan pola asuh ini tercermin dalam perkembangan sosial anak yang positif, seperti kemampuan berinteraksi dengan lingkungan sekitar, mengekspresikan empati, serta memiliki rasa tanggung jawab dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Pendekatan komunikasi yang terstruktur dan penuh empati membantu anak membangun rasa percaya diri serta mengembangkan keterampilan sosial yang baik. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa komunikasi interpersonal antara ayah *single-parent* dan anak bukan sekadar alat pengasuhan, tetapi juga mekanisme penting dalam membentuk karakter dan kepribadian anak..

**Keyword:** *Komunikasi interpersonal, ayah single-parent, pola asuh demokratis, perkembangan sosial anak*

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## 1. Introduction

Single-parent can generally be interpreted as a single-parent. Single-parents are single-parents who care for children and take care of the house without the help of a life partner, namely a husband or wife. Single-parent families have very heavy life responsibilities, namely, they have to work and have to take care of children. Single-parent families have the most complicated problems compared to families where there is still a father or mother. Single-parents occur due to death or divorce according to (Astuti & Suhartono, 2020) (in Heri et al., 2022), Single-parent families can occur due to various factors such as divorce between father and mother, death between father or mother which will require one of the parents to become a father or mother as a single-parent.

Communication is an important thing in human life, especially in interpersonal relationships within a family. Communication or interpersonal communication is the most powerful means in persuading others to change the attitudes, opinions, and behavior of communicants. Fathers have a big responsibility when their household conditions have an incomplete structure like families in general, it takes time to adjust to carrying out a dual role because the role or duties of a wife must now take over, where in these conditions he must act as a housewife, cook, care for, nurture, and educate his children, as well as acting as a father who seeks economic income to meet family needs. In this case, it can be said that single-parents who work experience role changes and increase the burden of tasks in their daily lives, where they used to only fulfill the role of parents, while now they have to become providers for their children and families (Jannah, 2022).

With the work of single-parents, they can meet the needs of themselves and their children, children's education costs, household needs, and also the needs for. Meanwhile, the family is also the most important and main component in the life process. In the family, single-parents build intense relationships with children, children get more love and attention from parents, and moral support from the family is also important for single-parents in their work and life, because work and family are the most important parts of human life, not easily separated. Both must run in balance, but often single parents face a dilemma in giving priority to both roles. Although being involved in both roles has positive effects, if single parents are unable to adjust responsibilities between the two roles, the potential for conflict between the two roles will increase, and such a situation is called work-family conflict.

A good father will try to educate his child and spend a lot of time paying attention to his children to form a good mindset, and the role of the father is very influential because children only get love from one parent, from this it can be concluded that the father must be able to divide the time to continue to accompany his child so as not to feel lonely and require children to be able to interact communicate with others to form a good social development pattern that will be created from a father's upbringing to his child. Therefore, the interpersonal communication of single-parent fathers to their children greatly influences the social development of children.

Parenting that parents have towards children there are various models such as democratic parenting is parenting done by parents who give freedom and a great sense of tolerance to their children and support the positive things that build the child, authoritarian parenting done by parents by fully holding the rights of children and all decisions are in the hands of parents without giving any tolerance, and permissive parenting gives all the

rights of freedom to children so that parents no longer care too much about the child so that parents can no longer control the child.

Single-parent parents are more focused on the parenting of a single-parent father who takes care of his child with a form of democratic parenting model where a father educates his child with various constructive considerations and the positive will of the child, a father and child play an important role in making decisions that will be determined by arguing with each other until they get the perfect result for the child and also good according to the father and support each other for the common good.

Quality dyadic interpersonal communication is interpersonal communication between communicators and communicants who have four elements of interpersonal communication.

According to Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor in the book (West & Turner, 2008: 196), Social penetration theory “refers to a process of relationship bonding in which individuals move from superficial communication to more intimate communication.” Intimacy here is more than just physical intimacy the dimensions of intimacy include intellectual and emotional, and to the extent that the couple performs the same activities; people's relationships vary greatly in the process of social penetration, husband-wife, supervisor-employee, golf-playing couple, doctor-patient until theorists conclude that relationships “involve different levels of change in intimacy or levels of social penetration” (West & Turner, 2008: 196).

The theory coined by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor refers to interpersonal relationships. As stated by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor in Alvarisi, 2017, social penetration theory describes the process of relationship bonding in which individuals move from superficial communication to more intimate (complex) communication. Altman and Taylor emphasize that the intimacy in question is not just a physical relationship, but intellectual and emotional to the extent that couples do activities together.

Social Penetration Theory explains the process of social communication with the formation of relationship development patterns. This theory suggests that humans cannot establish a close relationship with someone in a short span of time, but it takes some time for individuals to open up to each other. Usually individuals who are new to each other will just talk as a form of formality. At first glance it doesn't seem important, but “small talk” is the first step in the next process, towards more intimate communication. Social penetration is analogous to the layered skin of an onion, which is in accordance with the nature of human personality.

This theory assumes that relationships will develop from non-intimate relationships to intimate relationships through the process of developing meaningful relationship patterns. Therefore, it can be seen from these assumptions that the process of forming interpersonal relationships develops gradually from the lowest to the deepest level. Humans in social life have a layer of information that can be exchanged freely, and other information is shared with certain individuals who are considered close. This means that individuals have opinions, prejudices, views, and feelings that are layered (Hasyim, 2024).

Interpersonal communication is the process of conveying information, thoughts, and certain attitudes between two or more people in which there is an alternation of messages both as communicants and communicators to achieve mutual understanding, regarding the problem to be discussed, which is ultimately expected to change behavior (Purwanti et al., 2022).

The meaning or understanding of interpersonal communication is easy to understand if we understand the meaning or understanding of interpersonal communication in anonymity. Interpersonal communication can be understood as the use of language or thought in communication media. Therefore, interpersonal communication can be understood as communication that requires more than one person or several people. The process of interpersonal communication above shows a communication process of delivering messages from the sender of the message to the recipient of the message.

Interpersonal communication can improve human relationships between the parties involved in communication. In social life, a person can get ease in his life because he has a life partner. Interpersonal communication is able to improve the human relations of the parties involved in communication. Trying to foster good relationships through interpersonal communication, thus avoiding and overcoming the conflicts that occur. Below are some functions of interpersonal communication, namely:

1. Expressing attention to others. Communication has the purpose of showing attention to others. In this case, a person communicates by greeting, smiling, waving when meeting, bowing to an older person, asking about the health of the interlocutor, and so on.
2. Finding oneself. In this case, to carry out interpersonal communication, an individual wants to know and recognize personal characteristics based on information obtained from others.
3. Discovering the outside world: Obtaining an opportunity to convey information from others, including important and actual information in interpersonal communication.
4. Building and maintaining harmonious relationships As social beings, one of the greatest needs for every human being is to build and maintain good relationships with others.

The role of parents in the education of their children is to provide basic education about attitudes and skills, such as religious education, character, manners, aesthetics, love, and security. Children are like clean white paper that is ready to be painted with anything by their parents. So it can be said that everything that children get is the result of the formation of their parents.

The parenting style chosen by parents in interacting and nurturing children can determine how the child's character development will be. This is in line with the opinion of Walker and Henning in Zubaedi (2011) that parenting style contributes to the child's further development, including the discipline character that exists in children. Basically, character is composed of three interconnected parts, including moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral behavior. Good character includes knowledge of goodness, desire for goodness, and how to do good, which in this case requires habituation in thoughts and behavior. There are many types of parenting patterns that parents apply to children (F. K. A. Putri et al., 2022).

Single-parent father means a single parent who raises his own child without the help and support of a mother. Lately, more and more people prefer to become single parents rather than maintain a marriage. In addition, some become single-parents because their spouses have returned to the lap of the Creator. Ready or not, one must be prepared to face it. Broadly speaking, a single-parent father means a single father who raises a child without the intervention of a mother. Single-parent fathers are also synonymous with widower status due to the loss of a life partner.

Meanwhile, according to Duval & Miller (1985), single-parents are parents who maintain and raise their children without the presence or support of each other's spouses (Suprihatin, 2018). In line with Duval & Miller's opinion, Hurlock (1989) defines single-parents as single-parents, both mothers and fathers, who are responsible for children after the death of their spouse, divorce or separation, and the birth of children out of wedlock (Hurlock, 1988). The single-parents referred to here mean that they can be said to be fathers or mothers who take care of their children after divorce or death (Putri, 2022).

The process of learning to conform to group standards, morals, and habits is also called social development, which is an achievement in social relationships. become a unit, communicate and work together (Ariyani, 2021). According to Yamsu Yusuf (2007), social development is the achievement of maturity in social relationships. In addition, social development can be defined as the process of learning to conform to the habits, morals, and standards of the group. melting into a single entity and communicating and cooperating.

Their close relationships with parents or caregivers at home, especially family members, determine their social development as children. Social interactions progress from the household to the neighbors and finally to the school. The process of parents' care and guidance of their children in introducing various aspects of social life or societal norms, as well as encouraging and modeling for them how to apply these norms in their daily lives, greatly affects their social development.

Social development has a close relationship with research on single-parent fathers' interpersonal communication in parenting. As the main figure in the family, single fathers play an important role in instilling moral values, building independence, and helping children adjust to social norms. Interpersonal communication is the main means to form relationships that support children's development, especially through democratic parenting that involves children in decision-making. This research also highlights the relevance of Erik Erikson's stages of social development, where good communication can support children's self-confidence and social identity. With social penetration theory, father-child relationships are described as evolving from superficial interactions towards deeper openness, building emotional closeness that supports overall social development.

## **2. Method**

This research is a study using qualitative methods with a descriptive approach, which is an approach that prioritizes understanding and interpretation of a subject and object of research, both through written and oral words on human behavior.

The qualitative research method is a research method based on the philosophy of postpositivism, which is used to research natural objects (as opposed to experiments) where the researcher is the key instrument, data collection techniques are combined (triangulation), data analysis is inductive or qualitative, and research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization. Descriptive research is research conducted to describe or describe the objects and phenomena under study (Subhani et al., 2021).

In qualitative research, researchers try to be able to observe and reveal the reality that occurs in the field and want to know and see directly in depth how interpersonal communication is used by fathers in children's social development, so the author will try to analyze and describe the situation on the object, so that clear conclusions can be obtained about this research.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Dyadic interpersonal communication used by fathers with democratic parenting to shape children's social development involves a dialogic approach that creates a relationship of mutual understanding, trust, and support between fathers and children. Through dyadic interpersonal communication, fathers with democratic parenting can create harmonious relationships with their children. Communication that is full of openness, empathy, and respect not only strengthens the father-child relationship. It can also help children develop good social skills, such as self-confidence, critical thinking, and respect for others.

Here is how interpersonal communication is applied:

1. Self-Disclosure and Openness: Fathers openly discuss family values, expectations, and rules. Children are given space to express their feelings, opinions, and experiences without fear of judgment.
2. Dialogical Approach: Fathers use a two-way method, actively listening and responding. They encourage children to think critically and make decisions through joint discussions.
3. Appreciation and Positive Reinforcement: Fathers praise or show appreciation for their children's efforts and achievements, no matter how small. This helps children feel valued and boosts their confidence in social situations.
4. Empathic Approach: Fathers demonstrate empathy by understanding their children's emotions and needs, especially during social challenges.
5. Instilling Social Values: Fathers teach essential values such as tolerance, empathy, cooperation, and responsibility through stories, advice, or examples of actions.
6. Giving Freedom within Limits: Fathers allow children to make decisions while providing clear guidance and boundaries.
7. Resolving Conflicts with Healthy Communication: When misunderstandings or disagreements arise, fathers and children are encouraged to discuss and work together to find solutions without assigning blame.

Through dyadic communication used by fathers with democratic parenting in shaping children's social development refers to direct interaction between fathers and children that is two-way. This approach allows fathers to be a figure who supports, educates, and provides space for children to develop socially.

Children's social development is the process by which children learn to interact with others, understand social norms, and build healthy interpersonal relationships. This development is very important as it affects a child's ability to adjust in various environments, such as family, school, and society.

Dyadic interpersonal communication between single-parent fathers and children has a major influence on shaping children's social development. As the only parent responsible for all aspects of a child's life, fathers must fulfill a complex and challenging role. Not only fulfilling material needs, but fathers must also ensure that children's emotional, educational, and social needs are well met. In this study, dyadic interpersonal communication proved to be a very effective approach in carrying out democratic parenting.

Dyadic interpersonal communication involves direct interaction between the father and the child, where an understanding and supportive two-way dialogue occurs. This approach allows the father to be the one who not only gives directions but also listens attentively to the child's needs. One of the main features of dyadic communication is openness. Fathers actively share family values, expectations, and rules, while providing space for children to express their feelings, opinions, and experiences. This kind of openness creates an atmosphere where children feel safe and valued, making it easier for them to express what's on their minds.

In addition, empathy plays an important role in this communication pattern. Fathers try to understand the child's emotions and needs deeply. When children face difficulties, fathers not only provide solutions but also show a caring attitude that makes children feel emotionally supported. This empathy can be seen in how fathers notice signs of sadness or worry in children and immediately engage them in discussion. This attitude gives children a sense of security, which is an important foundation in building healthy social relationships.

Equally important, the appreciation given by the father to the child's efforts and achievements is also an integral part of this parenting. For example, when the child succeeds in an activity or competition, the father not only gives praise but also provides rewards, such as celebrating the child's success by eating together at a favorite restaurant. This appreciation not only makes the child feel valued but also boosts their self-confidence, which is very important in interacting with the social environment.

Freedom within limits is another aspect that is very prominent in this single-parent father's parenting. Children are allowed to make their own decisions, such as choosing extracurricular activities or determining steps in solving problems. However, this freedom is given with clear direction so that children still understand the consequences of the decisions they make. This process helps children learn to take responsibility for their own choices while developing critical thinking skills.

This approach also includes how fathers resolve conflicts with their children. When there is a difference of opinion or misunderstanding, fathers do not take an authoritarian approach; instead, they discuss to find a solution together. This type of conflict resolution teaches children the importance of healthy dialogue in resolving problems, both within the family environment and in the broader community.

In addition, this study highlights the role of fathers in instilling social values such as empathy, tolerance, cooperation, and responsibility. These values are taught through inspirational stories, fathers' life experiences, or by providing real examples in everyday life. This process not only enriches children's horizons but also shapes them into individuals who are more sensitive to the needs of others.

The study also noted how dyadic interpersonal communication helps strengthen the emotional connection between fathers and children. The child feels like they have a place to talk and be listened to without fear. This warm relationship is an important foundation for children in building their self-confidence. With healthy communication patterns, children adjust more easily in various social environments, whether at home, school, or in peer groups.

The results of this study also show that democratic parenting applied by single-parent fathers creates a balance between providing freedom for children to explore themselves and providing necessary direction. This approach provides space for children to develop their potential, while ensuring that they remain within safe and purposeful boundaries.

Ultimately, this study shows that single-parent fathers are not only able to perform dual roles but also manage to create relationships that support their children's optimal social development. With dyadic interpersonal communication, fathers can help children develop self-confidence, empathy, and the ability to interact with others in a positive way. This approach reflects how loving and democratic parenting can shape children into individuals who are confident, independent, and able to socialize well in society.

This study provides an in-depth look at the important role of dyadic interpersonal communication in single-parent families. The findings can serve as a reference for other single-parents in carrying out effective parenting, as well as for institutions or parties who want to develop support programs for single-parent fathers in improving the quality of their relationships with their children.

Social penetration theory, proposed by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor, explains how interpersonal relationships develop gradually, from superficial communication to deeper and more intimate relationships. In the context of dyadic communication between single-parent fathers and children, this interaction does not occur instantly, but through a gradual process of openness.

At first, the communication may be limited to daily routines, such as asking how the children are doing. However, over time, this interaction develops into deeper communication, where children feel more comfortable expressing their feelings, problems, and thoughts to their fathers. This pattern is consistent with the concept of depth of penetration in social penetration theory, where relationship closeness develops through gradual self-disclosure.

In addition, the concept of breadth of penetration in this theory is also relevant to how fathers guide children through various aspects of social life, such as how to interact with friends, resolve conflicts, and understand social values. Through intense and open communication, children begin to learn to understand social norms and form a strong character.

In this study, it was found that fathers with democratic parenting implemented several interpersonal communication strategies that support children's social development:

1. **Openness in Self-Disclosure**  
Fathers actively share family values, expectations, and rules, so that children feel more comfortable expressing their feelings and opinions without fear of judgment.
2. **Dialogical Approach**  
Communication is two-way, where fathers not only give directions but also listen and encourage children to think critically and make decisions based on joint discussions.
3. **Appreciation and Positive Reinforcement**  
Fathers give appreciation for their children's efforts and achievements, no matter how small, so that children feel valued and more confident in socializing.
4. **Constructive Conflict Resolution**  
When conflicts occur, fathers and children discuss to find solutions together without blaming each other, which teaches children how to solve problems with healthy communication.

With this kind of communication pattern, research shows that children raised in a democratic parenting environment tend to have high self-confidence, critical thinking skills, and good social skills.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study concludes that dyadic interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in shaping children's social development in single-father families. Through democratic parenting, single-parent fathers can create open, empathetic, and supportive communication patterns that strengthen emotional bonds with their children. The two-way dialogical approach allows children to express their feelings, opinions, and experiences freely, which enhances their sense of being valued and understood.

The findings indicate that openness, empathy, appreciation, and constructive conflict resolution are essential elements in building healthy father-child relationships. Fathers who balance guidance with freedom help children develop self-confidence, responsibility, critical thinking, and social adaptability. This communication model also supports children in understanding social norms, expressing empathy, and forming positive relationships with others.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that single-parent fathers are capable of fulfilling both emotional and social roles when supported by effective interpersonal communication strategies. Dyadic communication not only functions as a parenting tool but also serves as a fundamental mechanism in shaping children's character, personality, and social competence. Therefore, strengthening interpersonal communication skills among single-parent fathers is essential for promoting optimal child development in both family and social contexts.

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