

An Exploration of Family Functioning Dimensions from the Perspectives of Male Emerging Adults Raised in Dual-Earner Families

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Abstract

Dual-earner families bring particular patterns that can influence family functioning. In this context, male emerging adults facing complex developmental demands are often associated with the stigma of masculinity and emotional restraint. They are also reported to experience poorer family functioning. This research explores the dimensions of family functioning from the perspective of male emerging adults who were raised in dual-earner families. This study used qualitative descriptive phenomenological design. The participants were three male emerging adults (aged 18-25) who lived with both parents working outside the home for at least 40 hours per week. Participants were selected through criterion sampling. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were held to collect data, which was then analyzed thematically and validated with member checking. The results show that participants' understanding of family functioning across six dimensions is shaped by their personal experiences, while distinct challenges showed in communication and affective involvement dimensions. Providing material needs is perceived as strengths in dual-earner families, although it tends to reduce the quality of family interactions. This study enriches the understanding of family functioning in dual-earner families based on the subjective perspective of male emerging adults, and can be a reference for family-centered policies and interventions.

Keywords: dual-earner, emerging adulthood, family, family functioning, male

Abstrak

Keluarga *dual-earner* menghadirkan dinamika yang berdampak pada keberfungsian keluarga. Dalam konteks tersebut, laki-laki *emerging adulthood* dalam menghadapi tuntutan perkembangan yang lebih kompleks kerap dilekatkan dengan stigma maskulinitas, ketertutupan, serta dilaporkan mendapat keberfungsian keluarga yang lebih buruk. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan dimensi keberfungsian keluarga berdasarkan perspektif laki-laki *emerging adulthood* yang diasuh dalam keluarga *dual-earner*. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan dengan desain fenomenologi deskriptif. Partisipan penelitian terdiri atas tiga laki-laki *emerging adulthood* (usia 18-25 tahun) yang tinggal bersama kedua orang tua yang bekerja di luar rumah minimal 40 jam per minggu. Pemilihan partisipan dilakukan menggunakan teknik *criterion sampling*. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur secara tatap muka dan dianalisis secara tematik, dengan validasi data melalui *member checking*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman tiap partisipan membentuk pemaknaannya tentang semua dimensi keberfungsian keluarga. Kekhasan ditemukan pada dimensi komunikasi yang berpotensi memicu konflik akibat isi pesan, serta keterlibatan afektif yang dapat menimbulkan ketidaknyamanan. Seluruh partisipan menilai bahwa keluarga *dual-earner* mampu memenuhi



kebutuhan material, tetapi cenderung mengurangi intensitas dan kualitas interaksi keluarga. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dalam memperkaya kajian keberfungsian keluarga *dual-earner* dari perspektif subjektif laki-laki *emerging adulthood*, serta dapat dijadikan referensi pengembangan kebijakan atau intervensi berbasis kesejahteraan keluarga.

Kata kunci: *Dual-earner, emerging adulthood*, keluarga, keberfungsian keluarga, laki-laki

Introduction

Family plays a crucial part in shaping how an individual interprets and navigates the world. It functions as the first social environment where individuals are supposed to develop the necessary skills to manage life's evolving challenges. This influence operates as a continuous social context that remains vital from the formative years of early childhood through the critical transition into emerging adulthood (LeBlanc et al., 2022). Awaru (2021) stated that families perform essential functions, including creating a sense of home, providing education, and fulfilling basic material needs. When these functions operate effectively, family members are more likely to develop healthy psychological conditions. Conversely, dysfunctional family processes or interactions may increase psychological vulnerability and maladaptive behavior (Djabumir, 2016).

Traditional patriarchal values in Indonesia have presumed a family structure where men serve as primary breadwinners and women take responsibility for domestic duties (Juniarta & LentAr, 2020). However, women's labor force participation reached 55.41% in February 2024, showing that social changes have transformed these roles (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). As a result of this change, dual-earner families, those in which both spouses work, are becoming more common in the society. The benefits of dual-earner families range from financial stability and greater personal space or privacy for children to develop independence (Azka & Ninin, 2023). At the same time, parental work demands can reduce interaction time, which leads to children experiencing emotional difficulties and stress (Gemellia & Wongkaren, 2021; Handayani et al., 2024). When parents experience work-family stress, parenting may be affected negatively and increase the risk of emotional and behavioral issues in children, thus possibly resulting in dysfunctional family dynamics (Rustham, 2019).

Epstein et al. (2005) emphasized that any family system, regardless of its composition and situation, is able to establish healthy functioning by maintaining a supportive environment satisfactory to all members. Given these challenges, understanding how dual-earner families maintain healthy functioning becomes important. To further understand these dynamics, this study utilizes the McMaster Model of Family Functioning (MMFF) by Epstein et al. (2005) as its theoretical framework, which captures the unique challenges each family faces through its interrelated dimensions and can be applied to any family system. Notably, the MMFF recognizes that family members over the age of 12 perceive family functioning differently based on factors such as family composition, cultural values, and parental work habits (Epstein et al., 2005), making it particularly relevant for examining dual-earner families.

MMFF defines family functioning as the family's ability to fulfill basic needs while maintaining the well-being of its members in physical, social, and mental aspects (Epstein et al., 2005). The MMFF identifies six interrelated dimensions that determine overall family functioning: problem solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, and behavioral control (Epstein et al., 2005). Since any challenges faced by a family may directly affect the effectiveness of its functioning across each dimension (Epstein et al., 2005), the challenges in dual-earner families, particularly limited interaction time and emotional instability, may challenge problem solving and communication, complicate role integration between work and family, reduce affective responsiveness and involvement, and affect the flexibility of behavioral control. Together, the subjective perspective allows a more comprehensive understanding of how dual-earner families function in reality.

Prior studies on dual-earner families in Indonesia have primarily focused on its impact on adolescents (Azka & Ninin, 2023), but emerging adults, who face unique developmental and gender-related problems are less noticed. Emerging adulthood is the phase between ages 18 and 25 that is characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and optimism toward possibilities (Arnett, 2017). Family support remains significant during this stage because while individuals gradually gain independence, they have not yet fully transitioned into the weight of adult responsibilities (Arnett, 2017; Djabumir, 2016). In short, previous findings emphasize that family functioning plays a critical role in shaping how emerging adults internalize or externalize behavioral problems.

The challenges of this transition are often more pronounced for male emerging adults due to societal expectations of masculinity about independence, achievement, and productivity that leads to stigma when these expectations are unmet (Arnett, 2017). In the context of dual-earner families, these expectations may clash with the reality of reduced parental interaction time, potentially limiting the emotional validation available to sons. This matters because parent-son relationships can be more fluctuating during the transition to adulthood. Parents generally show better family functioning and warmth toward daughters than sons and perceive their sons more independent (Puspitawati et al., 2021). These gendered patterns of family interaction may increase psychological risk for male emerging adults.

Men who lack emotional validation often fall back on suppressing their feelings to fit traditional masculine expectations, which ultimately undermines their ability to manage stress effectively (Flynn & Black, 2018). Unaddressed stress may subsequently manifest through maladaptive coping strategies, as such behaviors tend to increase during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2017). During this vulnerable period, positive family relationships are said to be a critical protective factor for male emerging adults (Arnett, 2017; Salimah & Nuryanti, 2021; Wowor & Risnawati, 2024). It is proved essential for successful identity consolidation and emotional well-being (Kaniušonytė & Žukauskienė, 2018). Within this framework, understanding male emerging adults' perspective of their family functioning in dual-earner families becomes important to reveal how these dynamics shape their transition toward adulthood.

Despite growing research on dual-earner families, studies centering the subjective perspectives of male emerging adults on family functioning through the MMFF dimensions remain rarely explored, particularly in the Indonesian context. Therefore, to address this gap, this study employs a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach to uncover how male emerging adults subjectively perceive the six dimensions of family functioning in dual-earner families. These findings highlight how growing up in dual-earner families, along with the gender expectations within them, can shape how they perceive and make sense of their experiences. By examining more deeply, we can better understand how family experiences become an important source of support as individuals move toward adulthood.

Methods

Participants

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design. It was designed to explore participants' real experiences and reflections about family functioning within their dual-earner families, without integrating prior interpretations (Neubauer et al., 2019). Participants were three male emerging adults aged 18-25 years who were selected using purposive criterion sampling, where individuals are intentionally selected based on predetermined criteria (Nashrullah et al., 2023). The criteria determined were: (1) male emerging adults (age 18-25); (2) Lived and raised in a dual-earner family where both parents work full-time (minimum 40 hours per week). Before data were collected, participants got an informed consent and information sheet to explain the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical aspects. Online chat was used for rapport to establish participant trust and comfort. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was ensured.

With ethical considerations in place, adequacy of participants is determined by the depth and relevance of the data rather than numerical representation with the most possible research time and resources. Following Hennink and Kaiser (2022), the number of participants was determined by the point of data saturation rather than a fixed numerical requirement, ensuring the depth of the participants' stories sufficiently captured the phenomenon. In this study, saturation was evaluated through an ongoing process of data collection and analysis, in which new interviews were assessed for the emergence of new codes and themes (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Saturation was reached when no new codes or themes emerged, as evidenced by the fundamental similarities across three participants' views while still maintaining the uniqueness of their individual experiences.

Table 1. Overview of research participants

Pseudonyms, Age	Ar, 21	Bu, 20	Ca, 22
Domicile	South Tangerang	North Jakarta	South Tangerang
Current activities	Recent graduate seeking employment	Interning and thesis preparation	Recent graduate seeking employment

Hobbies	Exercising (gym and basketball)	Watching movies	Watching movies, playing video games, and hiking
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Table 1. Overview of research participants (Continue)

Pseudonyms, Age	Ar, 21	Bu, 20	Ca, 22
Birth Order (siblings)	First of two children (younger brother - 15 years old)	Second of two children (older sister - 22 years old)	Second of three children (older sister - 23 years old, and younger brother - 20 years old)
Households Members	Father, mother, younger brother, grandmother	Father, mother, older sister	Father, mother, older sister, younger brother
Father's Occupation			
Occupation Type	Full-time physical education teacher & basketball coach	Business Owner - Steel Factory	Business Owner - Agriculture and Shrimp Farming
Working Days, Duration	Mon–Fri, 6 AM–9 PM	Mon–Sat, 5 AM–6 PM	Mon–Fri, 9 AM–5 PM
Mother's Occupation			
Occupation Type	Full-time corporate worker in tax & accounting services	Full-time corporate worker in finance, tax, and accounting services	Business Owner - Building materials supplier
Working Days, Duration	Mon–Fri, 6:30 AM–7 PM	Mon–Sat, 8 AM–6 PM	Mon–Fri, 8 AM–6 PM

Data Collection

Data were derived entirely from participants' reflective meaning-making of their lived experiences. It was obtained through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. Interviews were held in September 2025 in South Tangerang, based on mutual agreement and participants' comfort. The interview guideline was developed based on the McMaster Model of Family Functioning. It mainly consisted of open questions, but flexible for probing and clarification when necessary. The questions were designed to explore both participants' family backgrounds and their experiences of living with working parents. Examples of interview questions (translated from Bahasa Indonesia) include:

"How do you make sense of your family at this point in your life?"

"How does your family communicate about problems?"

"How does your family provide a comfortable space for you?"

Each interview lasted approximately 110-130 minutes and was divided into two parts. The first part aims to explore participants' backgrounds as a child in a dual-earner family. The second part deepens participants' perceptions of their family functioning and interaction, guided by six dimensions of MMFF: problem solving, communication, role, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, and behavioral control. The interview involves audio recording with participants' consent, which was then written down as transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy for analysis.

Analysis

Thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was selected for its flexibility in identifying and deeply exploring patterns across participants' experiences of family functioning. The analytical processes were (1) data familiarization, (2) initial code generation, (3) themes development, (4) themes reviews, (5) themes refinement, and (6) report production. Transcripts were used to determine coding that developed themes inductively based on participants' narratives. Data sufficiency was considered achieved through in-depth rapport building with each participant, allowing the analysis to capture the depth of their personal experiences.

To ensure the validity of data, several strategies were employed. First, reflexivity was maintained by continuously reflecting on the researchers' own backgrounds, assumptions, and potential biases throughout the research process. An audit trail was also kept by documenting all research decisions, including coding processes and theme development, to ensure transparency and consistency of the analytical process. Finally, member checking was conducted by presenting the results to participants via chat, allowing them to read, provide clarification or additional information if needed, and verify the accuracy of researcher interpretations with online meetings.

Findings

Overview of Research Participants

The study included three participants, called by the pseudonyms Ar, Bu, and Ca. All three participants are male and aged between 20 and 22 years, categorizing them within the developmental stage of emerging adulthood. Each participant has siblings and lives in a nuclear family with a mother, father, and children. All of the participants have the same basic family structure, but they differ in terms of birth order and who lives with them. One participant even lives with extended family.

All of the participants come from families where both parents work. Ar's dad is a physical education teacher, and his mom works in a corporate setting. Bu's dad owns a steel business, and his mom works in corporate tax and accounting. Ca's father is also in the business of farming and shrimp farming, and his mother owns a building materials business. Thus, it can be said that all participants come from dual-earner families in which both parents are employed. In all cases, parents usually work five to six days a week, from Monday to Saturday, and spend at least eight hours a day working outside the home. This means that all parents have some work responsibilities that require them to spend more time away from home.

To gain a deeper understanding of how the six dimensions of family functioning within the MMFF manifested in participants' lives, the researchers first explored how participants constructed meaning about their own families. Participants were asked to reflect on their perceived position as emerging adult sons within the family unit, their lived experiences growing up in a dual-earner household, and the broader values and beliefs they held about family in general. These three background aspects, each captured under the first three themes, served as necessary groundwork that provided a contextual lens through which the subsequent exploration of each MMFF dimension could be more meaningfully interpreted.

Theme 1: Masculinity Construction within Family Relationships

As male participants, they reflect the construction of masculinity through their roles, interactions, and perceptions within family relationships. Although some of these dynamics have changed over time due to their parents' work responsibilities, each participant talked about their relationships within their nuclear family. Ar and his father used to get along well, especially because they shared an interest in sports. At the same time, he felt more emotionally connected to his mother, as she was more involved in his daily life and tended to pay closer attention to him. He also felt a close bond with his younger brother without any certain activities. In contrast, Bu thought that his father is more likely to feel rather than thinking with logic. Bu felt uneasy with the conversation with his father, thus he valued his relationship with his mother more as she is more logical. Overall, Bu viewed his relationships with his parents as largely practical, especially when it came to them providing for him. Meanwhile, Ca used to feel close with his father through their habit of watching films together. Over time, this closeness faded as his father's work responsibilities required him to travel frequently and wasn't home as much. Ca felt more emotionally connected to his mother, especially because they shared an interest in culinary. He said he was fairly close to his older sister, but did not talk to his younger brother at all.

All three participants saw their tendency as sons differently. The way they understood it seemed to grow out of their everyday experiences at home. For Ar, being a son meant holding back personal struggles, as he believed boys should not add to their parents' burdens. Bu, however, did not see emotional restraint as something tied specifically to gender. He thought that it is a normalized family interaction and internalization of parental traits. Ca was thought by his grandfather to be tough and not to show sadness as a boy, and his attempt to open up received a negative response. As a result, he chose to keep more of his thoughts and feelings to himself. Participants' experiences show that masculinity perceptions can be shaped through various values, habits, and family contexts.

"...Actually, it's not that I don't trust my parents or don't want to share with them. ...I don't want to add to their mental burden, hehe." (Ar, 21)
"While a major factor is that I've adopted my mother's reserved personality, my parents' work schedules also contribute to my closeness." (Bu, 20)
"My grandfather used to say, 'Boys shouldn't cry, they have to be strong. If there's a problem, just smile until it passes'." (Ca, 22)

Theme 2: Experiences of Growing Up in Dual-Earner Families

The experience of growing up in dual-earner families influences how participants perceive and navigate their family relationships. Within the context of dual-earner families, all participants acknowledged both benefits and challenges. A primary advantage that was told by all participants is financial sufficiency, while Bu thought that he also became more resilient and independent. On the other hand, the participants recognized that parental work demands limited interaction time that decreases the intensity of emotional closeness. Ar and Ca felt lost and sad due to the limited presence of their mothers, even so, all participants present understanding that their parents work for the family. At the same time, Ca recognized his mother's desire to work to pay for her personal hobbies independently.

"At first, I felt distant from my family, especially my mom, since her work made her less present at home." (Ar, 21)

"Our needs were more than met, and because my parents were working, I became independent, handle many responsibilities on my own." (Bu, 20)

"It was sad, but I accepted it, knowing both my parents were busy with work and household responsibilities." (Ca, 22)

Regarding role responsibility, Ar and Ca saw their dad's main job as working, and their mom's work as supplementary, This made them admire and appreciate their moms more. In contrast, Bu felt that working is an equal responsibility for parents nowadays. His perspective shows variations in how children interpret economic roles.

"...working is simply his responsibility (dad). But for my mom, that's what I really appreciate, because... more like she wants to contribute to help the family." (Ar, 21)

"...I think both parents need to work nowadays." (Bu, 20)

"It is indeed a responsibility for men to provide for the family. But for mom, it's more of an additional role." (Ca, 22)

Theme 3: Family as a Place of Belonging

Prior to discussing specific aspects of family functioning, participants describe their understanding of family in more general terms. Despite differences in their experiences, all participants described the family as a place they could return to and rely on. Ar viewed his parents as a blessing who guided his life. Although Bu was aware of his family's fragility, he still expressed gratitude for their presence in his life. Ca described his family as a space where members could share and support one another during difficult times. Compared to the others, Ar's narratives carried more explicitly positive tones, while Bu and Ca tended to express their evaluations more cautiously. Bu, in particular, referred to his family functioning as "flawed". Nevertheless, each participant recognized that their basic needs were met and that essential roles within the household function pretty effectively. Even though there were negative experiences, all three participants were still able to see their families in a meaningful and positive

way. This reflects a sense of acceptance and gratitude that seems to develop over time, even when family life does not fully match one's ideal expectations.

"My family is a home I can return to, with parents who guide my growth. It's not perfect, but I'm glad to be part of it and grateful that my parents can provide for me." (Ar, 21)

"I care for them, regardless of all the flaws. I still love them and remain grateful. Even though they have imperfections, they still function, not limping, with both legs moving, even if in pain. I continue to keep them in my prayers." (Bu, 20)

"Family can be seen as a safe space, where no matter how far or long we go, we always return. Family members should support each other and, during difficult times, work together to find a way forward rather than giving up on one another." (Ca, 22)

Theme 4: Problem-Solving (Dimension 1)

Problem solving is the ability of family members to work together to solve problems so that the family can stay healthy and work well together. In the dimension of problem-solving, the three participants had different ways of noticing and reacting to issues. Ar described that his parents typically identified problems and initiated resolution efforts, whereas Bu and Ca thought that children also played roles in recognizing and mediating conflicts. These differences extended to the resolutions part, as Ar's family tended to engage in discussions, while Bu and Ca experienced family patterns in which problems were often left unresolved. Based on these experiences, Bu and Ca made a reflective awareness as they perceive a non-optimal nature of their families' way of problem-solving. Both participants emphasized the importance to talk things through more to stop problems from happening again. They tried to be more assertive in their relationships with siblings and romantic partners.

"We try to talk about problems, like what's going on, what are we feeling, and discuss how things can improve so that everyone feels comfortable on the next day." (Ar, 21)

"The way we're used to handling problems is to stay silent and just let things go. Conflicts are always left unresolved." (Bu, 20)

"I think problems should be talked about. We need to explain how we feel and try to understand each other. I try to apply this with my sister and my partner, so the same problems won't happen again" (Ca, 22)

Theme 5: Communication (Dimension 2)

Communication is when family members talk to each other and share information in a clear and direct way so that everyone understands. All participants described holding back their emotions when talking to their parents, especially when the topic involved personal concerns. Their limited emotional aspects when communicating with their family members (*vice versa*) makes them perceive that their communication seems unclear. Ar preferred not to share too much to avoid burdening his parents, while Bu admitted feeling uncomfortable when interactions became more emotionally close. Ca similarly experienced difficulty in being open because he felt pressure as a child to comply with parental authority. All participants preferred personal communication over

joint discussion, such as Ar who frequently discussed matters with his mother, or Ca who tended to confide in his older sibling when seeking advice. Ar rarely experienced miscommunication, whereas Bu and Ca experienced tensions arising from their mothers' communication styles that were more confrontational or inconsistent to her nonverbal expressions. These stories indicate that family communication dynamics are also shaped by the communication styles that are developed through daily interactions.

"Sometimes my mom would talk about her day, and she would encourage me to share as well." (Ar, 21)

"I'm very open with my friends, but I create an unspoken barrier with my parents, it feels uncomfortable" (Bu, 20)

"Even though I know my mom's advice is what I need, she usually delivers it by scolding, verbally or non-verbally. Her tone sometimes comes off as blaming, which led to arguments between us." (Ca, 22)

Theme 6: Role (Dimension 3)

Roles are the patterns of behavior that family members use to do their jobs, such as dividing up responsibilities and holding each other accountable. In viewing family roles, fathers are often seen as providers, leaders, and decision-makers. Ar and Ca similarly viewed their fathers as primary decision-makers, and they described their father's role in encouraging children to explore the external world. Interestingly, Bu shared his father's involvement in household activities, cooking, as a form of expressing affection. As for Ca, the father figure is known as a source of emotional warmth. When talking about their mothers, each participant highlighted something different. Ar saw his mother as a source of emotional comfort, Bu viewed his mother as the one who managed household needs and made strategic decisions. Meanwhile, Ca described his mother as someone who taught values and guided his behavior.

The children's roles also varied, from focusing on their educational responsibilities, to helping with household chores or parents' work. Roles in Ar's and Ca's families developed naturally through daily life interactions. Bu's family roles were set by his mother. In general, family roles were largely associated with providing resources and overseeing the household, including making decisions, managing finances, and setting rules. Among the three participants, emotional support appeared most clearly in Ar's description of his family experience.

Theme 7: Affective Responsiveness (Dimension 4)

Affective responsiveness is how well a family can give its members consistent and appropriate emotional responses to the things that happen to them. The way affection was expressed in each family seemed to develop from long-standing emotional patterns about how comfortable each member felt in showing or receiving affection. Ar said that his trust to his parents came from their ability to show support and advice. Bu perceived his family dynamics as very lacking overt affection. As a result, he came to understand love less through verbal or emotional displays and more through physical presence and the fulfillment of material needs. In contrast, Ca noticed that his mother and older sibling could show many feelings, but he, his father, and his younger sibling held back.

Ca also sometimes felt awkward when his parents showed affection. Both Ar and Bu recognized that their parents' tiredness after work changed how they showed emotions.

"When I share some problems with my parents, the conclusion I get from both of them is always like... it's okay. Life can sometimes make us feel down, sad, frustrated, or angry, but that's just how it goes. I feel happy and accepted by my family." (Ar, 21)

"My emotional needs are almost unmet in the family. When my parents come home tired, my mom gets angry and my dad shuts down. I've gotten used to it. As long as they're still providing for me, that's enough." (Bu, 20)

"My dad used to hug me out of nowhere, hmm... kissed me on the cheek. It happened a lot when I was little. But if it happens again now, it feels strange and awkward, especially with my mom. I don't even remember the last time we hugged." (Ca, 22)

Theme 8: Affective Involvement (Dimension 5)

Affective involvement is how much family members care about and are interested in what each other does as a way to help. Participants' experiences with parental interest and attention varied in the affective involvement dimension. Bu believed that although his father occasionally shows interest in his life, his mother doesn't really show any. However, Bu tended to keep his emotional distance because these displays of involvement unnerved him. Ar and Ca, on the other hand, felt more a part of the family because they supported their parents. Because they felt encouraged to do their interests, Ar and Ca also felt comfortable with their families.

"When I was really ambitious for sports, my parents, especially my dad, would remind me not to overdo it. It made me feel cared for and I'm grateful for that." (Ar, 21)

"I never really paid much attention to my parents' work, it always seemed so monotonous. And honestly, it felt like they didn't make much effort to get closer to me. Over time, we just got used to keeping our distance." (Bu, 20)

"Sometimes I noticed my parents taking an interest in the things I liked. For example.. my mom actually started watching horror movies just because I loved them. It was kind of funny, but also made me feel really seen." (Ca, 22)

Theme 9: Behavioral Control (Dimension 6)

Behavioral control is the way that a family manages behavior in situations that could be dangerous, such as when needs are met and expressed, and when people behave in a way that keeps the family together. Every participant talked about developing rules at home, primarily to ensure order and protection. These rules didn't always feel like they were formally applied in Ar and Bu's families. Instead, they seemed to emerge naturally from daily life, with parents monitoring compliance. While Bu described more precise boundaries around actions that might be deemed risky, Ar discussed rules pertaining to basic manners and social behavior. Curfew was one of the limitations Ca had to deal with. In his situation, his mother played a more significant part in establishing and upholding those boundaries. They all agreed that rules were

necessary, but Ca acknowledged that he occasionally felt under pressure from how stringent they could be. There were also differences in the penalties for violating the rules. Ca remembered being directly punished, Bu occasionally had to deal with his parents' rage, and Ar rarely faced serious responses. When considered all together, the families' methods of behavior control varied, but they consistently maintained order within the family.

"My parents didn't really limit me when I was younger. They only enforced small guidelines, like coming home on time. Maybe they trust me to make wise decisions, such as abstaining from alcohol and drugs, and they have come to regard me as trustworthy after realizing my responsible behavior." (Ar, 21)

"Setting rules in the family is necessary conceptually. Practically, during my adolescence, they were limiting at times, like curfews for safety, but still reasonable." (Bu, 20)

"It was strict, and I used to be annoyed when punished for breaking reasonable rules. But I realized it was probably mom's way of making sure we took her rules seriously." (Ca, 22)

Table 2. Cross-case overview of family functioning dimensions

Dimension	Ar, 21	Bu, 20	Ca, 22
Problem Solving (Dimension 1)	Problems discussed openly; parents initiate resolution	Tendency to stay silent; issues often unresolved	Open discussion encouraged, but family patterns often leave issues unresolved
Communication (Dimension 2)	Limits self-disclosure to avoid burdening parents; miscommunication rarely escalates	Discomfort with emotional openness; tension from confrontational style	Difficulty being open due to parental authority; tone and wording trigger conflict
Roles (Dimension 3)	Father as decision-maker; mother as emotional comfort; roles develop naturally	Father involved domestically; mother directs role distribution	Father as authority; mother instills values; roles clearly structured
Affective Responsiveness (Dimension 4)	Emotional validation and guidance; feels accepted	Affection expressed through provision rather than emotion	Affection limited and sometimes awkward; varied emotional expression among members

Table 2. Cross-case overview of family functioning dimensions (Continue)

Dimension	Ar, 21	Bu, 20	Ca, 22
Affective Involvement (Dimension 5)	Accompanies mother; receives support for activities	Minimal parental involvement; maintains emotional distance	Mutual involvement; parents show interest in his preferences
Behavioral Control (Dimension 6)	Flexible rules based on trust; no specific sanctions	Safety-focused rules; occasional parental anger	Stricter rules; explicit consequences; father authoritative

Discussion

This study was conducted to explore the dimensions of family functioning from the perspectives of male emerging adults raised in dual-earner families. From in-depth interviews, dual-earner family context and its functioning are perceived in both the same and different ways. In general, participants' understanding of family was aligned with Awaru's (2021) understanding of family as a "home," a source of education, and a provider of material needs. Participants were still able to identify positive aspects within their families and expressed positive emotions or reflections, although they recognized certain limitations. This finding is consistent with the MMFF assumption that healthy family functioning is defined by the presence of positive characteristics rather than the absence of problems (Epstein et al., 2005), an assumption also echoed in the recent Walsh's (2016) Family Resilience Framework.

The findings also showed the uniqueness of each participant's family condition. Some families displayed consistent emotional response at the same time with autonomy for children. By contrast, other families presented minimal emotional closeness, so their relationships were more practical and material. In a different family, affections were paired with less intense interaction. According to SAR (2019), each family differs in its relational patterns and circumstances, which influence its function and shape children's development. The MMFF itself recognizes that family functioning is not defined by a single standard, as each family has its own unique characteristics, habits, and circumstances that shape how its members perceive and experience functioning (Epstein et al., 2005). Rather, the six dimensions serve as a lens through which each family member's subjective perception of functioning can be understood and defined (Epstein et al., 2005).

The participants' understanding of work responsibility was one of the study's most notable findings. Two participants believed that men, or fathers, should remain the primary providers, while a mother's income is seen as supplementary. This view reflects the traditional view of gender roles, where men are positioned as breadwinners and women are primarily associated with domestic responsibilities (Azka & Ninin, 2023). In contrast, one participant felt that both parents should share the responsibility of working equally. His perspective mirrors the shifting realities of today, where more women are actively participating in the workforce (Hidayati, 2022). Research by

Naimmah and Izza (2025) says that fathers' involvement in chores fosters more egalitarian role perceptions in children. This might explain one participant's modern view, since he perceives that his father cooked as a way of showing love.

All participants agreed that parents worked primarily to fulfill their needs. In families with relatively stable economic conditions, work was seen as a way to not only to provide basic materials, but also to support hobbies independently, as described by one participant. This presents a more mature capacity of emerging adults to interpret parental motivations as part of development (Fingerman & Yahirun, 2015). Additionally, some participants admired their mothers for handling chores and professional work, which supports the idea that sons tend to appreciate their mothers' sacrifices for the family (Fatmasari & Nurhayati, 2020).

This study saw various patterns of father-son and mother-son relationships. Two participants felt close to their fathers because of the hobbies, which fits with Fatmasari and Sawitri's (2020) findings that doing things together helps fathers and sons bond. One participant also shared that fathers who were relaxed and funny also made him feel comfortable. On the other hand, closeness with mothers often came from mothers's ability to show actions of care (Fatmasari & Nurhayati, 2020). Some participants perceived mothers as more emotionally sensitive to their experiences and changes, which influenced their understanding of mothers' roles and problem-solving contributions within the family. This is supported by previous research stating that mothers tend to have greater sensitivity toward their children (Nur & Zainuddin, 2024).

Epstein et al.'s (2005) framework regarding three potential problem areas was reflected in participants' experiences. The dual-earner condition enabled families to meet instrumental needs, categorized as basic task areas, through sufficient material resources. However, this was accompanied by reduced parental time and energy for interaction, contributing to limitations in affective aspects. As said by Zefanya et al. (2025), work can be a source of conflict that disrupts family harmony. Participants also described family roles in managing hazardous task areas through behavioral control rules that regulated social behavior and potentially risky situations. This is consistent with previous findings highlighting the role of the family in preventing harmful actions, particularly among adolescents and emerging adults who are more vulnerable to long-term negative consequences (Pinquart & Reeg, 2025). Meanings related to developmental task areas did not emerge explicitly in participants' narratives, as participants did not describe their family experiences in those terms.

Family functioning, as conceptualized by Epstein et al. (2005), consists of six dimensions: problem solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, and behavioral control. Within the problem-solving dimension, the MMFF emphasizes the family's ability to identify, address, and evaluate solutions to maintain stability (Epstein et al., 2005). Participants demonstrated this by describing diverse family problems and reflecting on effective strategies as well as aspects requiring evaluation in daily life. Participants' analyses reflect emerging adulthood as a developmental phase conducive to family reflection in preparation for adult life (Arnett, 2017). Moreover, less effective problem-solving described by two participants mirrored broader family dynamics perceived as less optimal, consistent with Epstein et al.'s (2005) assertion that ineffective problem-solving may negatively affect overall family

functioning. This is further supported by empirical findings that problem-solving ability can contribute to family function and instability (Pourmovahed et al., 2018).

In the communication dimension, the MMFF emphasizes clear and direct message delivery as key indicators of effective family communication (Epstein et al., 2005). This dimension has been widely recognized as critical in maintaining family interactions and managing conflicts, particularly in dual-earner families (Angraini et al., 2024; Pramono, 2023). While participants generally communicated preferences directly with specific family members, all tended to limit emotional expression which they perceive as unclear communication style, consistent with findings that masculinity norms shape emotional suppression and self-reliance in men (Mokhwelepa & Sumbane, 2025; Wang, 2025). Participants' differing reasons support the social constructionist view that culture, relationships, and experiences mold how we show emotions (Wang, 2025). In addition, one participant linked his closeness behavior to his mother's tendency to hide her feelings, supporting Husna and Chusniyah's (2025) findings that children will act like their parents when it comes to openness. When parents frequently interact and open with their children, children are more likely to express their emotions openly and manage them well (Azra et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, emotional restraint among participants did not seem to cause maladaptive functioning, as boundary-setting during emerging adulthood is typical and helps to figure out who they are (Goldsmith, 2018). Interestingly, two participants said that disagreements came from the message itself, not just how open they were. This result was similar to a study by Koriah, Sugiarti, and Safitri's (2025), which found that conflicts often arise from the way messages are delivered, including tone, word choice, and style. Therefore, while the MMFF identifies clarity and directness as central indicators, message content and delivery also emerged as significant determinants of communication effectiveness in this study.

In the role dimension, the MMFF examines how families allocate and fulfill roles to meet their members' needs effectively (Epstein et al., 2005). All three participants perceived their families as capable of fulfilling basic needs, though the distribution of roles differed across families. Fathers were generally viewed as providers and leaders, primarily focused on fulfilling material needs. Conversely, mothers were associated with emotional warmth and affective function, even though roles in the family were generally unique. Long-standing gendered role patterns are often difficult to renegotiate, as they become embedded in family norms and passed down across generations, contributing to their continuity even in dual-earner family contexts (Syrda, 2023). Gendered role distribution appears to influence the quality of interactions, which subsequently affects overall family well-being (Angraini et al., 2024).

In the affective responsiveness dimension, the MMFF focuses on the ability of family members to express and receive appropriate emotional responses toward one another (Epstein et al., 2005). One participant shared that the emotional support that he received from his parents helped him to manage personal challenges. This is consistent with Salimah and Nuryanti (2021) and Goldsmith (2018) who stated that empathy and emotional validation from family is very important during emerging adulthood. Contrarily, this study identified negative mood spillover, whereby work-related stress was carried into the family interactions (Repetti & Wang, 2017). Previous

research finds that work-related stress is more likely to be brought into family life than vice versa (Sunarti et al., 2020). This was presented in one participant's tendency to mirror his mother's post-work emotional responses, consistent with findings by Tisdale and Pitt-Catshoupes (2012) regarding the direct impact of parents' work-related emotions on children. It does not imply that negative emotions should not be expressed at all, as Epstein et al. (2005) emphasize that what matters is their appropriateness to the context. Thus, developing strategies to balance work and family demands in order to maintain effective family functioning is very important.

In the affective involvement dimension, the MMFF emphasizes that optimal involvement is expressed through actions, emotional engagement, and genuine empathy toward other family members to foster comfort (Epstein et al., 2005). However, work demands in participants' dual-earner families may challenge the consistency of such involvement. Fajrin and Purwastuti (2022) point out that parents may experience guilt when they feel they are not fully present in their parenting because of challenges in balancing work and family demands, as reflected in one participant's experience of his father apologizing for not being consistently present. Two participants felt grateful and happy when their parents showed interest in their activities. Feeling noticed and appreciated by family members can bring emotional comfort and a sense of happiness (Magdalena et al., 2023), directly contributing to higher subjective well-being among dual-earner families (Sunarti et al., 2025). Interestingly, parental involvement did not always foster comfort as the MMFF suggests. Instead, discomfort can rise when parents get involved in personal life as it feels like a privacy invasion. Excessive parental involvement may limit emerging adults' autonomy and ability to learn from their own experiences (Fatmasari & Nurhayanti, 2020; Urone et al., 2024).

In the behavioral control dimension, the MMFF emphasizes the importance of flexible yet consistent rules and consequences that adapt to situational needs (Epstein et al., 2005). Across all participants, rules are perceived as necessary with the degree of strictness and enforcement varied. However, overly strict punishment may be experienced negatively, as reflected in participants' feelings of being annoyed, despite its generally adaptive function (Pinquart & Reeg, 2025). Besides the implementation of rules, one participant also highlights the importance of parental trust, which refers to the sense of security children derive from knowing that their parents understand and respect their needs and desires, and is considered important across all age groups (Sugimura et al., 2023). Parental trust further enhances children's willingness to be open with their parents when needed (Sugimura et al., 2023).

This study is limited by its focus on a single perspective, male emerging adults as a child, which may not fully represent other family members' perspectives on family functioning. The relatively similar cultural and socioeconomic conditions of the participants may also limit the relevance of these findings in more diverse contexts. Future research can expand the results by considering different groups of participants.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

Family functioning is a very personal meaning shaped by each own memories and reflections. It is influenced by day-to-day interactions, habits, and the way individuals make sense of relationships as they grow through different stages of life. This is why every family member can reflect six dimensions of family functioning in different ways, although they lived in the same kind of structures. Some dimensions were interpreted as effective to support basic daily needs, while others were seen as lacking, particularly in emotional or affective aspects. This variation supports the MMFF assumption that family functioning should be understood holistically as the interaction among dimensions, instead of through the effectiveness of separate parts.

Participants in this study highlights that a healthy family is not a perfect family. Effective family functioning is indicated by its ability to adapt and keep positive feelings alive. Family members were able to realize emotional distance and communication barriers, while at the same time maintaining acceptance, gratitude, and positive meaning toward their families. The reflective ability seen among male emerging adults shows the developmental significance of this developmental stage. Therefore, families function during young adulthood may be the key in offering support and shaping who they are as a human being. The findings of this study highlight the importance of psychological and emotional fulfillment in dual-earner families, even though certain challenges are unavoidable.

Recommendation

The present study proposes several recommendations for different target groups. For male emerging adults, identifying family function aspects that have been evaluated as effective, then applying these in current and future roles is recommended. At the same time, it is crucial to reflect on aspects that may have felt less than ideal. Being aware of these dynamics can help foster more meaningful and adaptive relationships, both within the family and in broader social settings. For dual-earner parents, it's important to maintain the family habits that work well, while also anticipating challenges that may arise from balancing different work roles. Finding the strategy to support family interactions time, communications quality, and basic fulfillment needs are the potential key to supporting overall family well-being.

For family counselors and other communities, this study offers a useful perspective on how family functioning can support the psychological development of males as they transfer into adulthood. These insights can be applied in counseling services or psychoeducational programs that address family dynamics. Future research could also include other family members, children of different genders or developmental stages, or families from other cultures or socioeconomic backgrounds to gain a different understanding of family functioning.

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Appendix A. Semi-Structured Interview Guide (Original Bahasa Indonesia Version)**[INTERVIEW GUIDE]****A PORTRAIT OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING DIMENSIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMERGING
ADULTHOOD MALES RAISED IN DUAL-EARNER FAMILIES****OPENING**

1. The researcher builds rapport with the participant. The rapport-building process begins when the researcher inquires about the participant's willingness to be interviewed and agrees on an interview schedule.
2. The researcher provides and ensures that the participant has given and signed informed consent before the interview begins.
3. Before the interview, the researcher briefly re-explains the points of the informed consent, such as the purpose of the research, the participant's rights, the duration of the interview, and permission to record and take notes during the interview.
4. Once the participant has given their consent, the researcher begins the interview with questions about the participant's personal data.

CLOSING

1. The researcher asked the participant if there was anything else they would like to share.
2. A group photo session was held to document the data collection process.
3. The researcher thanked the participant for their time and reminded them of the confidentiality of the data as stated in the informed consent.
4. The researcher asked the participant for permission to conduct member checking.