

Permissive Parental Behavior (A Study of Family Communication in Palu City)

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary family life, the relationship between parents and children is increasingly shaped by pattern of communication that emphasize openness, trust, and individual autonomy. Within this context, permissive parental behavior does not always emerge as a fixed pattern of parenting, but may take different forms depending on the situations and decisions faced by the family. Contextual permissiveness in family communication: A qualitative study of parent-child communication in Palu, Indonesia examines how permissive parental behavior is manifested in family communication and the situations in which parents provide greater freedom to their children. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, this study draws on in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving four parents selected through purposive sampling, with children serving as supporting informant for source triangulation. The findings reveal that permissive behavior is expressed through appreciation of children's opinion, involvement in decision making, flexible application of rules, limited parental monitoring, minimal punishment, and freedom in personal choices. However, such permissiveness is not applied uniformly across family life. Parents tend to provide greater autonomy in matters concerning education, social relationships, employment, and future career choices, while maintaining boundaries regarding religious values, safety, and family principles. The findings further indicate that the communication patterns predominantly reflect characteristics of pluralistic families although consensual characteristics remain present in matters involving parental values and authority. This study argues that permissive parenting should therefore be understood as contextual and selective, suggesting that parental freedom giving can coexist with guidance, trust, and the preservation of fundamental family values

INTRODUCTION

The family is the first social environment in which individuals gain experience in communication, learn values and norms, and develop social behavior. Within the family, communication plays an important role in the parenting process because it enables parents to convey values, provide guidance, build emotional relationships, and understand children's needs and perspectives. Family communication occurs through the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages and constitutes an important part of the dynamics of relationships among family members (Octaviyana et al., 2025; Yulianti et al., 2023).

Family communication also functions as a means of socialization and learning for children. Fiese and Winter, as cited in Windarwati et al. (2021), explain that family communication provides a space for children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. In this process, family members not only exchange information but also express their character, identity, feelings, and perspectives. Open communication accompanied by mutually respectful feedback can strengthen interpersonal relationships and foster harmony within the family (Afifah et al., 2024; Yulianti et al., 2023).

Within these dynamics, parents may adopt different forms of parenting, one of which is permissive parenting. Permissive parenting is characterized by a tendency for parents to provide children with considerable freedom while maintaining relatively low levels of control and demands. Parents tend to give children space to make their own choices and express their preferences, while punishment, strict rules, and direct supervision are relatively limited (Fadlillah, 2022; Nirmalasari & Susanti, 2024).

Permissive behavior within the family can be observed in various aspects of children's lives, including education, social relationships, employment, media use, daily activities, and decisions regarding their future. However, the freedom provided by parents does not necessarily mean the complete absence of supervision or parental authority. Under certain circumstances, parents may still provide guidance, particularly when children's choices are related to family values, safety, or principles. Therefore, permissive behavior needs to be understood in relation to the context and communication situations that occur between parents and children.

This phenomenon is particularly interesting in the context of Palu City, where changes in social life and technological development have influenced patterns of communication and parenting within families. Social background, education, occupation, culture, and the relationship between parents and children may influence how freedom is granted and how parents exercise their supervisory role. This study specifically focuses on Palu City to examine how parental permissive behavior is manifested and the situations in which such behavior is applied in family life.

Previous studies have shown that parent-child communication is associated with the implementation of various parenting patterns. Mukorrobin and Basori (2025), for example, found that intensive communication between parents and children can foster open and harmonious relationships. The study also identified a permissive communication approach that provides children with freedom,

although unrestricted freedom without clear boundaries may pose risks to children's behavior.

Susanto and Kusuma (2024) also identified permissive communication patterns within families, particularly in the context of digital media use. These patterns were characterized by granting children considerable freedom with minimal supervision, whereas democratic patterns were demonstrated through parental guidance and two-way communication. Edlina (2022) found a tendency toward permissive communication patterns in the context of children's learning discipline during online learning. However, that study focused on the context of online learning during the pandemic, whereas the present study specifically examines permissive behavior as a family communication phenomenon in everyday life (Edlina, 2022).

Based on these previous studies, there remains an opportunity to examine permissive behavior not merely as a parenting pattern that emerges in particular contexts, but as the main focus within the dynamics of family communication. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how parental permissive behavior is manifested in family communication in Palu City and to identify the situations in which such behavior is applied.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family Communication

Family communication is an interactive process that occurs among family members through the use of verbal messages, nonverbal expressions, intonation, and particular actions. Such communication serves to build shared understanding, express feelings, and convey values and behaviors within the family environment (Safrudin, 2021, as cited in Tambunan & Hasibuan, 2023).

Fiese and Winter, as cited in Windarwati et al. (2021), view family communication as a means of socialization and learning for children, as well as a space that supports cognitive and socio-emotional development. Communication may take place through various family relationships, including interactions between parents and children. Thus, family communication functions not only as a process of information exchange but also as a means of developing relationships and mutual understanding among family members.

Open communication that provides opportunities for each family member to express their opinions can contribute to more harmonious relationships. Message clarity, feedback, and mutual respect are important elements in establishing effective family communication (Yulianti et al., 2023). In this study, family communication is understood as a reciprocal interaction process between parents and children that provides a space for expressing opinions, building closeness, making decisions, implementing rules, and negotiating freedom and parental authority in family life.

Permissive Parenting Behavior

Parenting is a form of parental responsibility involving the care, guidance, and direction of children to support their optimal development. Nirmalasari and Susanti (2024) explain that parenting is related to how parents provide time, attention, and support to facilitate children's development. Variations in parenting patterns can be observed through the level of parental control, freedom, and communication patterns applied by parents.

Rohayani et al. (2023) state that parents who tend to adopt a permissive approach are more likely to position themselves as friends or companions to their children. This relationship can create a high level of emotional closeness, but at the same time, it may be accompanied by a weaker assertion of the parents' roles as supervisors and decision-makers. In this study, the concept of permissive behavior is used to examine how the provision of freedom, low parental control, flexible rules, minimal consequences, and opportunities for children to make decisions are manifested in family communication.

Family Communication Patterns Theory

This study employs the Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCPT), which was first introduced by McLeod and Chaffee in 1972 and later developed by Koerner and Fitzpatrick. The development of this theory resulted in two main dimensions for understanding family communication: conversation orientation and conformity orientation (Ainiyah et al., 2026). Conversation orientation refers to the extent to which families encourage open communication, the exchange of ideas, and discussion among family members. Meanwhile, conformity orientation refers to the extent to which families emphasize shared values, obedience, and respect for parental authority.

The combination of these two dimensions results in four types of family communication patterns. Consensual families are characterized by high conversation and high conformity orientations. Pluralistic families have a high conversation orientation and a low conformity orientation. Protective families have a low conversation orientation and a high conformity orientation, whereas laissez-faire families have both low conversation and low conformity orientations.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design. This approach was selected because the study focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of how permissive behavior is manifested in family communication and the situations in which parents apply such behavior. The study was not intended to examine relationships between variables but rather to describe the phenomenon based on experiences and interactions occurring in family life. The research was conducted in Palu City, Central Sulawesi. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. The main informants consisted of four parents residing in Palu City who met the research criteria, including having lived in Palu City for at least five years, having children aged 17-25 years, maintaining regular communication with their children, and

providing children with considerable freedom in making decisions regarding education, employment, social relationships, and daily activities.

The study also involved one child from each main informant as a supporting informant. Information obtained from the children was used to strengthen data credibility through source triangulation, allowing the information provided by the parents to be confirmed from the perspectives of the children as parties directly involved in family communication. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to explore parents' experiences, perspectives, and reasons for providing freedom to their children. Observation was used to examine interactions and behaviors occurring within the family context, while documentation was used as supporting data.

Data were analyzed qualitatively by organizing and arranging data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation, followed by identifying patterns related to permissive behavior and family communication. The data were then interpreted based on the indicators of permissive behavior and the two dimensions of FCPT, namely conversation orientation and conformity orientation.

Findings

The findings show that all four informants had relatively close relationships with their children. Communication was generally open, and parents provided opportunities for their children to share their experiences, wishes, and problems. Emotional closeness served as a foundation for everyday communication. Parents tended to view communication as a means of maintaining trust rather than as an instrument of strict supervision.

These findings indicate that permissive behavior in this study did not simply represent a relinquishment of parental control but was also associated with a relatively strong emotional relationship between parents and children. Freedom was granted because parents trusted that their children were capable of communicating their concerns and considering the decisions they made.

Respect for Children's Opinions

Permissive behavior was reflected in parents' respect for their children's opinions and choices. Parents provided space for children to express their views on various matters and did not always position parental decisions as decisions that had to be followed. In the communication process, children were treated as individuals who had the right to express their opinions. Parents tended to listen to and consider their children's views before responding. This condition indicates an openness in communication that allows for a two-way exchange of opinions. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Arief Budiman:

"I must listen first, because I think children have the right to have a voice, as long as their opinions are reasonable, I will definitely follow even if I disagree or we have different views, I only give suggestions or views but don't force them because I want children to feel that they feel that they are there to be appreciated as I said earlier, more or less, especially men, men are happy to hear their opinions. That's why I said earlier that we as parents are listeners." (Interview results of Arief Budiman, June 15, 2026 at 20.06 WITA).

Based on the interview findings above, Arief Budiman provided his child with space to express opinions and considered those opinions in decision-making. When differences in views occurred, he tended to offer suggestions rather than impose his preferences. This indicates that the child's opinions were respected in family communication.

Family Decision Making

The provision of freedom was also evident in the decision-making process. Children were given opportunities to make choices concerning various aspects of their personal lives, such as education, employment, social relationships, and daily activities. Parents did not completely take over these decisions. Instead, they allowed their children to make choices based on their own considerations. The parents' role was primarily to provide guidance and input when needed. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Hasia:

"If it's a family problem, it must be the parents, but we don't always talk about family problems, there are several things outside of that such as his activities, his lectures, the problem of his using social media, the decision is in the child because as I said earlier, we as parents respect the child and take care of his feelings. If the decision is made, we will definitely talk to the child directly, we will deliberate on it, we talk about it together, we listen to the children's opinions, the children also listen to our advice, as I said earlier, family problems are also in the hands of parents, the rest is up to our children not to be forced." (Results of Hasia's interview, June 23, 2026 at 20.49 WITA).

Based on the interview with Hasia, it can be seen that she provided her child with freedom to make decisions concerning personal matters. The parent continued to provide guidance through discussion but did not impose decisions on the child. This indicates the provision of freedom in the decision-making process.

Rules and Supervision

Although the parents showed a tendency toward permissive behavior, they still maintained rules within the family. However, these rules were applied flexibly and were not always accompanied by strict supervision. Supervision was primarily exercised through communication and trust. Thus, parental control was not completely absent but rather took a different form. Supervision was not always manifested through restrictions on children's activities, but through

communication and attention to the children's circumstances. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Nur Faizin:

"Actually, I am a person who does not restrain children too much, the way I educate children is quite flexible, but there are 2 that I always remind quite firmly besides that I give freedom. These 2 things are friendship and curfew, so if for example the curfew if he says it is only until 10 o'clock, anyway it is 10 o'clock to communicate to confirm because he usually seems to want to add another hour, for example until 11 o'clock, I give it but it must be clear and still communicate. Well, if my friends see aspects like this, I don't see who he is, but if you are friends, don't be friends with people who invite you to negative things, that's all." (Nur Faizin interview results, June 15, 2026 at 16.53 WITA).

"I usually only ask him directly and usually chat with him how he is doing, what else, have he eaten or not, if he is at home, face to face if he is traveling or outside the house, use a cellphone. I don't have too strict supervision because he is already an adult, for example, if for example the use of a 121 cellphone or social media, we can't supervise it." (Results of Nur Faizin's interview, June 15, 2026 at 16.53 WITA).

Based on the interview findings above, Nur Faizin applied family rules flexibly while still allowing the child considerable freedom. Supervision was primarily exercised through communication and attention rather than strict restrictions. This indicates that parental control remained present but was applied loosely and adapted to the child's circumstances.

Parental Feedback on Children's Mistakes

The findings show that parental feedback when children made mistakes was primarily expressed through reprimands, advice, and direct communication. Parents tended to give children an opportunity to explain their mistakes before responding. Punishment or other consequences were applied minimally and were considered based on the severity of the mistake, the frequency of repetition, and what was considered reasonable within the family. Thus, parental responses were situational, with a tendency to preserve emotional relationships and avoid prolonged conflict.

"I will definitely reprimand, but I'm the type of person who doesn't want to prolong the problem, in some of my children sometimes when they are angry they even get angry or grumble too, so sometimes I just reprimand, I don't give a consequence why, because I think it's still a bit difficult for me to apply consequences to my child, just a reprimand, and as long as I reprimand some also accept it, it's just that there must be a repeat incident." (Results of the Reka interview, June 16, 2026 at 20.26 WITA).

Based on the interview findings above, Reka tended to reprimand her child when a mistake occurred without imposing consequences. This response

indicates a tendency to address the child's mistakes through communication while avoiding prolonged conflict.

Determining Children's Future Direction

The situation that most strongly reflected permissive behavior was when children made decisions regarding their future. Parents provided considerable freedom for children to determine their education, university major, employment, and career choices. Parents viewed these decisions as part of their children's lives and therefore recognized their right to determine the choices they would pursue. Nevertheless, parents could still provide considerations and guidance without taking over the final decision.

"A lot, yes, for the first child, it must be a matter of college and also work, 100% he is the one who decides, I will give him freedom, in terms of his future, there is no intervention from us parents, he really decides. Then also my friends don't have any rules that are once in friendship. I also don't limit the activities that he wants to participate in, like he wants to participate, he likes cars, sometimes he joins communities that modify the car, please I don't prohibit it, but the most dominant are two, the problem of the future and friendship. But actually for this Egy there are many things that I don't really manage in his life because of what, we don't really like to restrain children like that. For the second, it's almost the same as related to activities at school, he's still in school, so his activities are still few. Now for the second, like I said earlier, it's a matter of whether he is free to participate or not, but in the end, thank God he participated and won." (Results of Arief Budiman's interview, June 15, 2026 at 20.06 WITA).

Based on the interview findings, Arief provided his child with considerable freedom to determine matters related to education, employment, friendships, and activities they wished to pursue. The parent did not take over the decision-making process but allowed the child to make decisions independently. This indicates that permissive behavior was most evident in decisions concerning the child's future.

The findings above indicate that the freedom given to children was situational and selective. Greater freedom was provided in personal matters and decisions concerning the future, while in matters considered fundamental, such as safety, religious values, and family principles, parents continued to maintain their authority.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that parental permissive behavior in family communication in Palu City cannot be understood as unlimited freedom. Rather, it is better understood as the provision of flexibility that is adjusted to the situation and the type of issue faced by the child. This pattern is reflected in open communication, respect for children's opinions, opportunities for decision-making, flexible application of rules, trust-based supervision, and minimal use of punishment.

These findings indicate a relationship between permissive behavior and family communication patterns. When parents provide children with opportunities to express their opinions and make decisions, the conversation orientation within the family appears to be relatively high. Children are not merely recipients of messages but are also given space to participate in communication and decision-making processes. When viewed through the Family Communication Patterns Theory, the dominant communication pattern demonstrates characteristics of a pluralistic family. This is reflected in open communication, extensive opportunities for children to express their opinions, and freedom to make choices. The relatively low conformity orientation is reflected in the absence of demands for children to always follow their parents' decisions or preferences.

However, the families in this study cannot be entirely categorized as pluralistic families. In matters related to religion, safety, and family principles, parents still maintained their authority and expected children to follow certain values or boundaries. This condition demonstrates characteristics of a consensual family, in which open communication is maintained alongside parental authority. This finding is important because it shows that permissive behavior is not necessarily synonymous with low parental involvement. Unlike the characteristics of laissez-faire families, which are marked by low levels of communication and involvement, the parents in this study remained actively engaged in communication and demonstrated concern for their children's lives. The freedom provided was instead built upon trust and ongoing communication.

Decisions concerning children's future represented the most prominent context in which permissive behavior was applied. Parents provided freedom in matters of education, employment, and career because these decisions were viewed as part of their children's lives that they would pursue in the long term. In this context, providing freedom can be understood as both a form of trust and an effort to give children space to develop independence. Thus, the findings demonstrate that permissive behavior within the families studied was contextual, selective, and trust-based. Greater freedom was primarily provided in matters concerning children's personal lives and future, while issues considered fundamental remained within the parents' authority. This pattern demonstrates that family communication serves as a space for negotiating the balance between children's freedom and parental authority.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that parental permissive behavior in family communication in Palu City is not applied uniformly across all aspects of children's lives. Rather, such behavior is situational and adjusted to the type of issue faced by the child and the parents' considerations regarding the child's circumstances. Permissive behavior is reflected in open communication, emotional closeness, respect for children's opinions, freedom in decision-making, flexible application of rules, trust-based supervision, and minimal use of punishment. Permissive behavior was most evident when children made decisions concerning their future, particularly in choosing their education,

university major, employment, and career. In these situations, parents tended to provide considerable freedom because such decisions were viewed as directly related to the children's future lives. However, this freedom remained bounded. In matters concerning safety, religious values, and family principles, parents continued to maintain their supervisory role and authority.

From the perspective of Family Communication Patterns Theory, the family communication patterns identified in this study were most closely characterized by the pluralistic family pattern, particularly due to open communication, extensive opportunities for children to express their opinions, and freedom in making choices. Nevertheless, characteristics of the consensual family pattern also emerged in certain situations when parents continued to maintain family values and authority. Thus, this study emphasizes that permissive behavior in family communication is better understood not as unlimited freedom, but as freedom negotiated through communication, trust, and family values. These findings demonstrate that granting children autonomy can coexist with the continued role of parents as sources of guidance and guardians of values considered fundamental within the family

FURTHER STUDY

This study still has limitations, so further research on Permissive Parental Behavior is needed to refine this study and enhance the insights of readers and the authors.

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