

## THE DYNAMIC CHANGES OF PARENTS' ROLE IN WORK-FROM-OFFICE MOTHER AND WORK-FROM-HOME FATHER

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### ABSTRACT

Currently, a man is more flexible in carrying out his role as a breadwinner either outside the home or from home. This research aims to further understand the factors underlying these changes and their implications for family dynamics, gender roles, and societal norms surrounding decision-making processes in modern families. This research explores the decision-making process in a dynamic family consisting of a mother who works in the office (work-from-office mother) and a father who works at home (work-from-home father). This research uses a phenomenological and qualitative approach to look at the phenomenon of the role of fathers who work at home and mothers who work in the office. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with eligible couples. This research examines how gender roles influence decision making regarding family economic issues, children's education and family planning. These findings reveal important shifts in decision-making dynamics, with women taking more significant roles in these key areas. In particular, women show higher consideration and involvement in family economic decisions, children's educational choices, and family planning strategies. This shift highlights a shift away from traditional gender norms and underscores the evolving roles and responsibilities within contemporary family units.

**Keywords:** household; parent role; work from home; work from office.

### INTRODUCTION

A family, as defined by Indonesian Law Number 52/2009, is the smallest social unit and can be made up of a mother and her children, a father and his children, or a husband and wife. In the Indonesian context, each family member has their own role. In Indonesian culture, every family member plays a specific role. Fathers and mothers have traditionally played different responsibilities in the family; a father is in charge of generating the money and meeting the family's expenses (Chrisendo et al., 2020; Shaleh & Nuraini, 2021; Wulan et al., 2018). In addition to managing the home, cooking, and cleaning, a mother is supposed to be the family's nurturer and caregiver (Himawan et al., 2021; Yuniati et al., 2023). Furthermore, society continues to highlight that successful marriage and parenthood are essential for women (Afriliani et al., 2021). In the meantime, fathers who have a successful career and work in a profitable office are regarded as successful.

Traditional gender roles in the home are prevalent worldwide, not just in Indonesian society. According to societal perspective, a mother's primary responsibility is to care for her children at home, but males typically fulfill family obligations by performing public duties outside the home (Himawan et al., 2022; Orozco Collazos & Baldrich Mora, 2020; Rua et al., 2020). A housewife must devote a lot of effort to maintaining the home since she is seen as a solid family pillar. She provides family members with emotional support and encouragement because of her constant presence in the home.

Changing demographics inevitably affects the shifting in gender role's perception, since more than 50% of Indonesian millennials are starting to build a family (Pancawati et al., 2021). Traditional gender roles are being questioned by millennials, who are also questioning how economic inequality affects their perception of gender norms. Male and female millennial generations are inclined to rank financial freedom as their top motivation for working, making them equally more ambitious and educated than the previous generation (Baralt et al., 2020; Kagan & Lissitsa, 2023). The requirement for two incomes to support a family and the growing financial strain that both genders experience are the driving forces behind this change (Few-Demo & Allen, 2020). Because of this, Millennials are altering gender norms by evenly sharing domestic roles. A growing number of millennials are embracing rejecting traditional gender roles (Ruspini, 2019). This movement is a component of a larger effort to rethink gender expectations and norms.

As an integral part of changing demographics, the presence of career women in families is recognized and valued, contributing to collective agreements and shared responsibilities within the family unit (Herdianti, 2018). This is caused by many things, such as economic status and educational attainment. Many women are attempting to balance being a homemaker and a professional to fulfill their ambitions (Ashraf & Jepsen, 2024). The effort helps to strengthen the family's financial stability. They wish to support their husbands and take care of the necessities of the home, not because the husband's income is insufficient. Since women are becoming more educated, they wish to put their knowledge to use by finding employment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the breakdown of traditional gender roles, with fathers now frequently working at home. As a result, there has been an increase in "household fathers," or men who work mainly from home and are engaged in more housework and childcare responsibilities (Lee et al., 2023). A household father is a husband who works from home most of the time and takes care of childcare duties like meal preparation, bathing, and school transportation (Mukarromah et al., 2023). Although there are different definitions for the term, it usually refers to a male as a primary caregiver. While others stress the circumstances driving an enhanced domestic involvement, which highlights the husband's decision in this role.

Gender norms are being challenged by the rising number of dual-income homes, which are typically characterized by a mother who works in an office and a father who works from home (Pratisiya et al., 2023). In the past, men were supposed to be the main source of income, and women were largely expected to handle household duties (Hudde et al., 2021). An exceptional phenomenon to study the renegotiating of gender roles and the ensuing development of familial dynamics is presented by this new family structure. This study investigates the transformative processes taking place in these households through the prism of social reconstructionism as proposed by Theodore Brameld.

Bramled's reconstructionism refers to a process of social reconstruction that focuses on the role of education (Salazar & Acido-Muega, 2020). Brameld argues that increasing the level of education can make individuals in a society improve their critical thinking skills, which in turn can have an impact on the economic ability of the individual in the long run (Bramled, 1975). There are six principles, such as: (1) the main aim of education is to promote well-thought-out social reform; (2) educators must carry out their duties immediately; (3) the new social order must be democratic; (4) teachers must convince their students democratically of the urgency and reconstructionist viewpoint; (5) the means and goals of education must be changed to meet the demands of the social and cultural crisis; (6) children, schools, and education itself are largely shaped by forces social and cultural.

Many previous studies have explored how many fathers who opt to work from home engage with their children and navigate the different dynamics of their roles within the family. It is shown by the results that a number of varied factors shape a special experience, and social identity for parents who work from home (Pramanada & Dinardinata, 2020). Although many studies draw attention to the advantages of this job, like increased participation in childcare and household

tasks, several other research efforts have examined multiple drawbacks that many men might face, including social stigma and insufficient support. For instance, a study found that men who stay at home with their children have positive views about their self-concept, particularly in moral and physical well-being (Della et al., 2018). Unfavorable experiences with social and personal identity were also revealed by their research.

Previous studies have concentrated solely on the views of men regarding the role of work-from-home parents. They have overlooked the dynamic interactions between husbands and wives when gender standards are challenged. Society often enforces stereotypes by expecting women to be the main caretakers and men to be the only providers, which blocks the study of alternative family structures. The purpose of this study is to investigate how family dynamics are affected when a mother works from the office and a father works from home.

## METHOD

This research applied an exploratory qualitative research paradigm to look at certain phenomena in depth. The research approach chosen is phenomenology. Phenomenological research focuses on subjective experience, relating to an individual's view of an event and its interpretation (Nuryana et al., 2019). This approach aims to provide an in-depth and detailed understanding of social phenomena in the context of changes in the role of husband and wife. This approach was chosen because this study aims to understand and describe in depth how role changes occur in the family dynamics of work-from-office mothers and work-from-home fathers.

The main data collection technique used in this study was in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews allow the researcher to establish a deep relationship with the participants and understand their experiences thoroughly. Data collection was conducted in three stages. The first stage was informants' identification and selection. The second stage was the conduct of interviews. The third stage was transcription and data analysis. The informants of this study were selected based on their experience of the phenomenon being studied (Neuman, 2014). They consisted of six married couples with the following criteria: a mother who works from the office, a father who works from home, and has at least one child. The authors conducted in-depth interviews with six couples of informants from March to June 2024.

The authors emphasized the interview findings in our data analysis. Highlighting important phrases, quotes, or statements from the interviews helped interpret the data gathered and provided insight into the informants' experiences with the phenomenon. From these important statements, the authors created clustered groups of meaning that serve to capture the essence of the phenomenon.

## RESULTS

The in-depth interviews are used to gather detailed, subjective accounts of participants' experiences related to a specific phenomenon, their experience for work-from-office mothers and work-from-home fathers. The six pairs of informants are explained in Table 1.

Table 1 Informants' Profile.

Num	Initials	Occupation
1	IM and VA	Illustrators (Father) & Civil Servant (Mother)
2	DA and AL	Graphic Designer (Father) & Academic Journal Editor (Mother)
3	BR and FT	Freelancer (Father) & Staff (Mother)
4	KK and WM	Editor (Father) & Lecturer (Mother)
5	WK and AN	Entrepreneur (Father) & Private employee (Mother)
6	FZ and NA	Entrepreneur (Father) & State-owned enterprise employee (Mother)

Source: collected and compiled by the authors.

Based on the interviews' results and data analysis, this study revealed three discussions. The first is the change in the negotiation process of domestic tasks between husband and wife and decision-making, the second is the change in the positive stigma of the father who has become a stay-at-home father, and the benefits associated with changing roles within a family.

## DISCUSSION

Because they now actively participate in raising their children, stay-at-home fathers mark a change from the traditional role of husbands who usually work outside the home to make a living. According to this study, a "housefather" is a husband who still productively work but does not have to commute to work like most employees do. Additionally, when husbands work from home and wives work outside the home, a number of shifts in household dynamics have emerged. Being a housefather is a gradual process that arises from a number of factors that the husband and wife have decided upon together.

For example, if a wife quits her developing career to become a housewife, it could be viewed as a huge economic loss. When both partners work, couples may struggle to find someone to watch their kids, which causes they have to decide the family roles. Furthermore, in some circumstances, the husband's job can be completed remotely, enabling him to work from home, in contrast to the wife, whose employment necessitates her physical presence in the office. As stated by one of the informants, BR:

*"I was originally a private employee, but for some reason I decided to work from home, even before having children. In the ups and downs of life, my wife always supports what I do as long as it is good. When the child was born, we agreed not to hire anyone to help with the upbringing. Finally, because I don't have regular office hours, it was decided that I would accompany the children at home, and this has continued until now. "Apart from that, my wife's career, which is starting to show 'establishment', would be a shame if she left it, while I would have to start from zero if I had to work"* (BR).

The husband and wife work together to make these decisions. Every male informant of this study consented to help their wives who worked outside the home while they stayed at home to take care of the children and do housework. Women working outside the home is typical in today's world. The spouse supports his wife's career and urges her to stay employed rather than quit. In contrast, women were traditionally in charge of taking care of the home in traditional societal perspective. Even as parents, the husband and wife now work toward their professional career goals.

### Division of domestic tasks between husband and wife and decision making

The decision of household chores has become considerably more flexible as a result of husbands working from home. Housework, which was once thought to be the domain of women because they were frequently housewives, has changed over time. While the husbands work from home with more flexible hours, the wives work outside the home, and their schedules are set by their individual offices. Because of this, husbands and wives collaborate on domestic chores, disregarding gender norms.

*All informants agreed on the importance of dividing household tasks, though the specifics depend on the mutual agreement between husband and wife. Some couples allocate tasks based on the husband's abilities, while others have the husband manage everything until the wife returns from work. "We can each handle household tasks independently. The work is shared, especially by whoever is at home" (WK).*

Each couple contributes according to their skills and willingness. There is no rigid division of domestic chores. For instance, the husband may take on cooking and housekeeping duties if the wife is better at cleaning. They support one another when necessary.

Husbands and wives usually discuss with each other when making decisions. The two are transparent, with husbands asking their wives for their opinions. This is in contrast to the traditional perspective when the husband, who was considered the head of the family, was the only one who could make decisions. In the past, women were seen as weak and incapable of making judgments and decisions, and the husband's decisions were regarded as final (Zuhri & Amalia, 2022). Due to the dynamic shifted perspective, married couples now allow for open discussions on family matters, such as finances, family planning, children's education, and holidays.

*"The wife still manages the finances because wives tend to be more meticulous. When it comes to holiday planning, she also handles it as it aligns with her work schedule" (DA).*

Even while this contemporary division of domestic duties is more prevalent, not all families, especially those in Indonesia, can adopt it. Patriarchal standards are still common in many cultures, where the father is expected to provide for the family and the mother is viewed as a loving figure who takes care of the children at home. Society has long become accustomed to this social reality. According to Berger, the internalization and objectification of information in day-to-day existence shapes social reality (Sulaiman, 2016). Over time, routine behaviors become accepted. Therefore, every change in parental responsibilities is a new social construct that frequently elicits a range of responses since it goes against ingrained assumptions.

Family planning is a crucial component of family decision-making. The desired number of children, the time between them, and the preferred means of contraception must all be discussed freely by the couple. According to earlier studies, some women may covertly select contraceptive techniques without their husbands' knowledge because they disagree with family planning (Ihsani et al., 2019). In this study, however, husbands and wives worked together to discuss and decide how many children they desired.

*"For family planning, we decided together. My wife is afraid of spiral contraceptives, injection contraceptives, and hormonal contraceptive pills due to her allergy to medications. So, we decided on condoms because they are easy to obtain and carry no risk of complications" (BR).*

In certain cases, wives are the one who are responsible to make the final decision on family planning. Wives are also having more power in deciding contraceptive methods and the number of children while still respecting the husbands' opinion.

*"So even though we discuss it together, my husband tends to follow my decision. He offers his opinion, but the final decision is mine. For example, I initially wanted only one child, but my husband preferred two. After some consideration, I agreed to have two children but with a five-year gap. Our child is now three years old, and we continue to use natural family planning" (NA).*

In summary, the husband contributes to family planning in both direct and indirect ways. He may embrace family planning outright, but he also encourages and supports his wife's use of contraception indirectly. Given that family planning has ramifications for both couples, it is imperative that both spouses agree on the form of contraception (Adawiyah & Rohmah, 2021).

## **Positive Stigma**

Fathers who work from home are typically not stigmatized negatively by others. The majority of informants stated that they received positive feedback on working from home. It has long been assumed that the wife takes care of the children and the housework, while the husband works in the public sector and attends an office. Nonetheless, informants discovered that their families and the neighborhood accepted their role as a parent who works from home. However, the idea of

working remotely is still new to some people. According to one informant, the fathers themselves battle with the deeply rooted notion that they must work outside the home, therefore any unfavorable perceptions are frequently their own.

*"Actually, there isn't any outside negativity, but the real issue is the voice in my own head. I worried too much, creating bad thoughts about being a stay-at-home dad, and it stressed me out. Eventually, I resolved it and stopped thinking negatively" (BR).*

*"Thank God, I've never heard anything negative about being a housefather. Maybe there were a few mothers asking why I'm the one taking the kids to school or to the clinic, but within my family circle, no one has had an issue with it" (NA).*

It has become crucial for families to be transparent and talk about how decisions are made and duties are distributed equitably, even though some people still believe that moms should care for the children and fathers should work outside the home.

In Sweden, as a different cultural context, a father figure is considered ideal if he can help with domestic chores and kid care. This is also reflected in Swedish policy, which encourages both moms and fathers to work, assist with childcare, and take care of the home. Nonetheless, the primary responsibility of the father is still to provide for his family; in fact, this is a major aspect of the role of fathers everywhere (Bergnehr, 2022).

### **Benefits obtained from changing roles**

Husbands who work from home are able to participate directly in childcare and household chores. There are numerous advantages to this, especially in terms of fortifying their relationship with their wife and kids. In the past, mothers were largely in charge of raising children, but now men can now have an active part. Husbands get a deeper understanding of mothers and spouses as a result of their direct experience with the difficulties of childcare.

*"The husband takes 100% responsibility for taking care of the child, managing everything without the help of family or a babysitter. We also agree on our parenting style, so there's no confusion. For example, if I forbid our child from eating chocolate, my husband supports that decision, ensuring that even when I'm at work or with family, he informs others that our child is not allowed to eat chocolate" (NA).*

More control and consistency are occur when a collaborative approach to childcare is implemented. Parents can restrict outside assistance that could interfere with their child's development. The usage of babysitters or grandparents is reduced and a cohesive parenting style is upheld when the mother arrives in the afternoon and the father looks after the child in the morning.

Husbands who work from home can improve their ties with their children and their wives. Spending more time at home enables husbands to spend more time with their wives, whether at home or going to work with them, something that is rarely done when working in an office. This is consistent with studies demonstrating that married couples who work together can enhance their marriage since a more robust home economy benefits both parties. A productive, working lady contributes to the family's necessities, which raises the standard of care given to the kids (Rizkillah et al., 2015).

In addition, a lot of spouses actively encourage their wives to pursue higher education. Despite not having furthered their education, these spouses enthusiastically support their wives in continuing their education. They do not have any concerns if their wives pursue a higher educational degree. As a matter of fact, some of them even fully support their wives by providing more freedom in studying.

*"When my wife wanted to pursue a master's degree, I was already considering working from home, having previously been a private employee. We even discussed relocating to her university's location. For me, following my wife is no issue, as long as the intention is good" (IM).*

It is noteworthy to note that a wife's greater education can improve family life. According to research, households who have wives with higher levels of education tend to be more harmonious. An educated wife is better able to raise bright kids and encourage them to go to college. Additionally, a wife's higher education may open up greater job options, which would improve the family's financial status (Mukarromah et al., 2023).

The educational backgrounds of the husband and wife also have an impact on how their roles are divided. Higher educated couples typically have more adaptable, contemporary partnerships. They take a less strict approach to marriage, communicating openly and agreeing on how to divide roles (Sugitanata & Zakariya, 2021).

There are still issues in spite of the numerous advantages of changing gender roles. Parenting and job obligations must be carefully balanced by both working parents. When both are worn out from childcare and still have work to do, it can be a common problem and cause disagreements.

The fact that this study solely looks at couples with kids and does not differentiate between age groups is one of its shortcomings. Depending on the age of the children—infants, toddlers, or teenagers—the parents' roles can change dynamically because older children may also assume responsibility. There is a chance for more investigation because of these variations. In addition, the study's informants are from Javan municipalities. Examining viewpoints from several provinces with diverse cultural origins might be intriguing.

## CONCLUSION

The conventional roles of husband and wife have changed significantly with the move from the father's position as the breadwinner working outside the home to that of a stay-at-home father who works remotely while taking care of the family and a wife who works in the office. Domestic duties are now divided in contemporary households. Although women continue to provide the majority of care, husbands actively participate in childcare and domestic duties alongside their spouses. Managing the home and kids while making a living is a dual responsibility shared by both men and women. These responsibilities are frequently voluntary, with duties being assigned according to the particular needs of each family. Working women also participate in family decision-making, such as choosing their children's schools and handling money. Instead of leaving the mother to raise their children alone, husbands who work from home spend more time with them, deepening the link by actively participating in their development.

The study's conclusion is that modern husbands and wives now play a wider range of roles. Role division is customized to meet the unique requirements of every family condition. The perception of mothers working outside and fathers working from home has also improved in society. This change has the potential to improve family resilience and foster a more harmonious dynamic within the family.

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