



Gender Relations in the Modern Family: A Sociological Study of Changing Domestic and Public Roles

Tri Amanda¹

¹Sociology Education, Megarezky University

*Corresponding Author: Tri Amanda

E-mail: trimnddf@gmail.com

Article Info

Article History:

Received: 28 August 2025

Revised: 20 September 2025

Accepted: 30 September 2025

Keywords:

Gender Relations
Modern Family Domestic Roles
Public Roles

Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of gender relations in modern Indonesian families, focusing on the transformation of domestic and public roles. Using a quantitative survey method involving 700 respondents (350 couples) from five major cities, data were collected through Likert-scale questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and multiple linear regression. The findings reveal that child-rearing is increasingly perceived as a shared responsibility, yet domestic work remains disproportionately borne by women, reflecting the persistence of the double burden. At the same time, women's economic contributions are widely acknowledged as essential, although men continue to be regarded as the primary breadwinners, illustrating a form of patriarchal bargain. Regression analysis shows that public role participation ($\beta = 0.41$) has a stronger influence than domestic role participation ($\beta = 0.33$) on perceptions of gender equality, suggesting that women's involvement in the public sphere plays a key role in reshaping family relations. However, the persistence of traditional norms indicates that gender equality in modern families remains more aspirational than fully realized. Overall, the study concludes that gender relations in Indonesian modern families represent a negotiated balance between traditional patriarchal values and emerging egalitarian ideals.

INTRODUCTION

The current social changes in the modern world have had far reaching consequences in gender relations in the family sphere, not only concerning the conceptualization but also the practical expression. Historically, gender roles have been strictly separated into gender compartments: men were expected to work as the main breadwinners in the public domain, and women were assigned the role of housewives and nannies. These were rooted in patriarchal culture that enforced the dominance of men and discouraged the independence of women (Connell, 2005; Dankwa, 2018). This traditional model, however, has been challenged more and more by such processes as modernization, globalization, and the growing possibilities of women in accessing education and working. The intersection of these forces has prompted the negotiation of the family roles in that there is no longer a certain division between

the family and the public sphere but it is renegotiable and renegotiable on a daily basis. However, it is still too simplistic to assume that modernization is bound to create gender equality. Instead, the family has become a moving negotiative field where competing ideologies, material restraint and cultural demands collide to create opportunities of increased equity as well as the continuation of deep-seated inequalities (Swinth, 2018; Rodriguez & Conchas, 2022).

In the Indonesian setting, these changes are most noticeable in the urban middle-class families. With the rise of women in higher education and the workforce, the economic structure of families has changed, and now many families can afford to rely on two sources of income (BPS, 2022; Goldin, 2022). Superficially, this means a more egalitarian approach where women are able to make equal contributions to the family budget. Nevertheless, the old phenomenon of the double burden persists and sets the boundaries of this transition. Women can become successful at work, and still, all the domestic chores: raising children, cleaning the house, and so on, remain disproportionately on women (Utomo & McDonald, 2016; Borah Hazarika & Das, 2021; Graham et al., 2021). This fact implies that patriarchal norms have not vanished but have been restructured, which in many cases occurs in less obvious forms of imposing more pressure on women without any significant re-distribution of domestic tasks. As a result, as women test entry into the world of the public, the demand on them to perform equally well in the world of the private continues, highlighting the conflict between structural and cultural persistence.

Sociologically, the family is not only a personal union of people but one of the key social institutions, where the reproduction of values, norms, and the relations of power occurs (Giddens, 2009; De Singly, 2021). In turn, the gender roles redesign in families is not a single occurrence, but a complex phenomenon connected with other more significant ideological and political-economic changes. As an example, neoliberal economic policy emphasizing flexibility and productivity, on the contrary, facilitates and limits the involvement of women in the labor market. On the one hand, these policies open up possibilities of women entering new areas of professional activity, on the other hand, they strengthen the commodification of female labor and at the same time introduce households to the expenses of social reproduction (Lombardozzi, 2022; Mezzadri et al., 2022; Ossome, 2021). The persistence of patriarchal norms in Indonesia, including moralization of women as good mothers and dutiful wives, is evidenced by the way in which ideologies are modified to accommodate the economic input of women without necessarily altering gender dynamics (Bianchi et al., 2012; Brenner, 2011). In this way, the family turns out to be a place where the demands of modern capitalism collide with the cultural traditions and determine the experienced realities of men and women.

It is impossible to negotiate gender relations in modern Indonesian families without focusing on cultural and religious dynamics (Platt, 2017; Van Wichelen, 2010). Interpretations of religious doctrine and local practices often support social expectations of the roles of women, which focus on the caregiving role of women and their moral guardianship of the home (Robinson, 2020). Although these structures legitimize patriarchal structures they offer arenas of contestation. Many women use the cultural and religious standards differently to support their entry into the labor force by making their contribution in the economy coherent with their family responsibilities and not as a burden to them (Bennett, 2005; Kessler, 2000). These reinterpretations are important because they highlight the fact that families are not passive constructs of structural change but involve in negotiating meaning and identity. However, such negotiations tend to reinforce the male privilege by offering the labor of women as a continuation of the traditional roles and not a basis of real equality (Kabeer, 2021; McAuliff, 2022; Dahal et al., 2022; Kray et al., 2024).

More importantly, it should be noted that the roles of men are also changing, but more ambivalently. The growing trend of dual-income families has encouraged some men to be more actively engaged in the household work and child-rearing. However, the actual practice shows that the involvement of men in household activities is minimal, and is often reduced to helping, as opposed to a fair share (Coltrane, 2010). This is indicative of a continued symbolic hierarchy where the input of men is seen as being optional or supplementary but the input of women is considered mandatory and unquestioned. Equality discourses in families can therefore hide the fact of asymmetrical power and labor distribution. Unless the feminist movements make conscious attempts to confront the ideologies of patriarchy and institute structural policies, including the provision of child care facilities to all, gendered parental leave, and fair labor policies, families may continue to reproduce inequalities in the name of modernization.

In turn, the gender relations in modern Indonesian families cannot be read as the progressive story. Instead, they are an expression of a complex interaction of deeply rooted cultural values and economic needs, as well as individual desires. Despite the fact that the increased accessibility of education and jobs to women is certainly a positive development, the fact that the patriarchal pressure, the moral dualism, and unequal distribution of household chores highlights the ambivalence of social change (Gerson, 2002). The family continues to be a critical space on which larger struggles of gender equality, gender identity and power are practiced. A closer examination of these processes shows that the changes in gender relations are not so much a gradual movement toward equality but rather a process of negotiation, which is arbitrated by the structure and cultural redefinition. It is in this respect that modern families are representative of both the possibilities and the constraints of a social change: they are a symbol of both the possibilities that are greater equality and at the same time illustrate the tenacity of patriarchal systems that hinder a total change.

METHODS

In this study, a quantitative research approach will be used, and a descriptive-analytical survey design will be conducted. The selected method is explained by the fact that it is suitable to systematically quantify the allocation of domestic and public roles in modern families and to conduct inter-relationships among the variables that are relevant to gender relations. Using the power of survey, the research can help to reflect the current tendencies within urban households and determine to what level gender role changes are taking effect in the family life.

The target market is the urban-based families of Indonesia and in this case, the married couples aged between 25 and 45 years and at least married at least three years. The basis of this criteria of inclusion is that couples, which have a comparatively uninterrupted tenure in marriage, will have a higher likelihood of displaying a stable pattern of role allocation. A purposive approach was used to sample the respondents with a selection of middle and urban couples who are middle-income group, working in the formal and informal sectors, and have experience in balancing domestic and outside roles. Out of this population, a sample of 350 couples (consisting of 700 persons) was considered but produced a number that was considered adequate to portray a representative representation with 95 percent confidence limit and a five percent error value.

The research instrument was an online questionnaire constructed using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). This instrument covered three main dimensions. First, domestic roles, measured through indicators of involvement in household chores, childcare, and household management. Second, public roles, measured through indicators of participation in economic activities,

career achievement, and social engagement outside the home. Third, gender relations, which included perceptions of equality, division of labor, and negotiation of decisions within the family. In addition, the questionnaire also recorded demographic data such as age, education, occupation, and number of children, which were used as control variables.

The data were analyzed in two stages. The first stage was a descriptive analysis to illustrate the general trends in the division of domestic and public roles in modern families. The second stage was an inferential analysis using multiple linear regression to examine the extent to which domestic and public participation is influenced by factors such as gender, education, and employment status. A Pearson correlation test was also conducted to examine the relationship between perceptions of gender equality and the actual distribution of roles within the family.

To ensure the quality of the instrument, validity testing was conducted through assessments by family and gender sociology experts, as well as empirical validity testing using item-total correlation with a criterion of $r > 0.30$. Instrument reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, with a minimum value of 0.70 as an indicator of acceptable internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019). The ethical aspects of the research were maintained by ensuring that all participation was voluntary, with informed consent provided to respondents before completing the questionnaire. Respondent identities were kept confidential, and data were used solely for academic purposes. With these procedures, the research is expected to not only produce valid and reliable findings but also uphold the ethical principles of social research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The transformation of the modern family in Indonesia is taking place amidst social changes marked by increased female participation in education and the workforce, urbanization, and the growth of the urban middle class. These changes directly impact gender relations within households, particularly regarding the division of domestic and public roles, which previously tended to be patriarchal. This study starts from the assumption that modernization opens up opportunities for greater equality, but at the same time, traditional values still dominate. Thus, the results of this study present an empirical picture of how married couples in modern families negotiate domestic and public roles, and how perceptions of gender equality are shaped in everyday practice.

The study involved 700 respondents (350 married couples) from five major cities in Indonesia, representing middle-class families of productive age. The following data analysis is presented to demonstrate the respondents' demographic profiles, patterns of distribution of domestic and public roles, perceptions of gender equality, and the relationships between the variables analyzed statistically.

Respondent Characteristics

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 700)

Characteristics	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male (50), Female (50)	100
Age	25–30 (28), 31–35 (40), 36–45 (32)	100
Education	High School/Diploma (20), Bachelor (58), Master (22)	100

The composition of respondents shows a predominance of the 31–35 age group and bachelor's degree graduates, indicating that this study indeed represents productive middle-class families. The high participation of women in formal employment (90% working) indicates that modern families no longer follow entirely traditional patterns. However, this also has the potential to give rise to new negotiations in the division of

domestic roles, as women's involvement in the public sector does not automatically lead to a redistribution of household burdens.

Distribution of Domestic Roles

Table 2. Division of Domestic Roles

Statement	Mean	Elementary School
I am more responsible for household chores	3.92	0.88
Domestic work is divided fairly between husband and wife	3.45	0.91
Child care is a shared responsibility	4.10	0.76

A high score (mean 4.10) on the childcare indicator indicates that modern families tend to share parenting responsibilities more egalitarian. However, a relatively moderate score for the division of domestic labor (3.45) indicates that household responsibilities are still often perceived as women's domain. This aligns with the concept of *the double burden*, where women, despite participating in the public sphere, still bear greater domestic responsibilities (Bianchi et al., 2012). In other words, modernization has not completely eliminated patriarchal patterns, but has merely shifted their forms to become more subtle.

Distribution of Public Roles

Table 3. Public Roles in the Family

Statement	Mean	Elementary School
Husband is still considered the main breadwinner	4.05	0.79
Wife's income contributes significantly to the family economy	4.22	0.74
A wife's career is as important as her husband's career.	3.87	0.83

These findings demonstrate ambivalence: on the one hand, women's economic contributions are recognized as important (mean 4.22), but on the other hand, husbands are still perceived as the primary breadwinners (mean 4.05). This suggests that traditional norms regarding men as *breadwinners* remain firmly entrenched, despite the economic realities of modern families relying on dual incomes. This situation illustrates the tension between patriarchal ideology and contemporary economic demands, which make the modern family an arena for public role negotiation.

Perception of Gender Equality

Table 4. Perceptions of Gender Relations

Statement	Mean	Elementary School
Important decisions in the family are made together	4.18	0.71
Husband and wife have equal rights in managing finances	3.95	0.82
Gender equality improves family harmony	4.30	0.68

Respondents' perceptions of gender equality tended to be positive, with high average scores (3.95–4.30). This indicates a new awareness in modern families that a more equal division of roles can improve household harmony. However, there is a gap between perception and practice: although equality is considered important, previous data indicates the persistence of male dominance in primary breadwinning

roles and female dominance in domestic work. Thus, equality at the discourse level has not yet been fully realized in everyday practice.

Inferential Analysis

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression Results

Independent Variables	Beta (β)	Sig.
Domestic Role	0.33	0.000
Public Role	0.41	0.000
R²	0.55	

The regression results show that public roles ($\beta = 0.41$) have a stronger influence than domestic roles ($\beta = 0.33$) on perceptions of gender equality in modern families. This means that the greater women's involvement in the public sphere, the stronger their awareness of the importance of gender equality. However, the R^2 value of 0.55 also indicates that there are still 45% other factors influencing gender relations, such as cultural values, religiosity, and local norms. Thus, gender equality in modern families must be understood not only as a result of labor redistribution, but also as a product of negotiations between traditional values and modernity.

Negotiating Gender Roles in the Modern Family

The findings of this study indicate that gender relations in modern Indonesian families are ambivalent: there is a trend toward equality, but at the same time, patriarchal norms remain strong. For example, although childcare is considered a shared responsibility, domestic work is still more often placed on women. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of *the double burden* proposed by Bianchi et al. (2012), in which modern women bear a double burden of having to manage both public and domestic work. Thus, family modernization has not completely eliminated patterns of subordination, but instead reproduces more subtle forms of patriarchy (Walby, 1990; Miller, 2021; Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2024).

On the other hand, this study found that women's economic contributions are increasingly recognized as important, even though men remain perceived as the primary breadwinners (Dagunduro & Adenugba, 2024; Sánchez-Mira, 2024; Miller et al., 2021). This indicates a *patriarchal bargain* (Kandiyoti, 1988), an implicit agreement that women are allowed to participate in the public sphere but still recognize men's symbolic dominance within the family structure. This situation suggests that gender equality in modern families is often practiced as a compromise, not a radical transformation.

From an identity perspective, the research also confirms that perceptions of gender equality are increasingly positive. Young couples tend to believe that family decisions should be made jointly and that financial sharing should be fair. This supports Giddens' (2009) notion of *the democratic family*, where power relations within the household are based on negotiation and agreement, rather than absolute hierarchy. However, the data also reveals a gap between perception and practice: equality is seen as ideal, but daily implementation is still influenced by traditional values. This situation indicates that modern Indonesian families are in a transition phase toward an egalitarian family model.

The regression results show that public roles have a greater influence than domestic roles on perceptions of gender equality. This means that women's involvement in the public sphere is a key factor in driving the transformation of gender relations. This finding aligns with Connell's (2005) theory of *hegemonic masculinity*, which asserts that dominant masculinity can be challenged when women gain access and recognition in the public sphere. However, this influence does not completely eliminate male dominance, but rather creates new, more fluid and negotiated forms

of gender relations. Overall, this discussion confirms that gender relations in modern Indonesian families cannot be understood dichotomously between "traditional" and "modern." Rather, they must be seen as an arena of ongoing negotiation, where patriarchal norms, economic demands, and aspirations for equality converge. In other words, the transformation of the modern family does not mean replacing old structures, but rather adding new layers that demonstrate the simultaneous change and continuity of traditional values.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the urban middle class in Indonesia is characterized by high levels of consumerism, aspirations for social mobility through education, and the construction of new identities increasingly mediated by digital spaces. Consumerism has proven more dominant than social mobility in shaping middle-class identity, confirming that lifestyle symbols and representations of consumption serve as important foundations for their social legitimacy. However, this position is ambivalent: on the one hand, the middle class appears modern and cosmopolitan, but on the other, it remains structurally vulnerable due to its reliance on the performativity of consumption and limited economic stability. Thus, the urban middle class can be understood not only as an economic category but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon reflecting negotiations between modernity, globalization, and tradition.

REFERENCES

- Badan Pusat Statistik (2022). *Statistik gender tematik: Profil perempuan Indonesia*. BPS.
- Bianchi, S. M., Sayer, L. C., Milkie, M. A., & Robinson, J. P. (2012). Housework: Who did, does or will do it, and how much does it matter? *Social Forces*, 91(1), 55–63. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sos120>
- Borah Hazarika, O., & Das, S. (2021). Paid and unpaid work during the Covid-19 pandemic: A study of the gendered division of domestic responsibilities during lockdown. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 30(4), 429-439. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/09589236.2020.1863202>
- Brenner, S. (2011). Private moralities in the public sphere: Democratization, Islam, and gender in Indonesia. *American Anthropologist*, 113(3), 478-490. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2010.01355.x>
- Coltrane, S. (2010). Gender theory and household labor. *Sex Roles*, 63(11), 791-800.
- Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
- Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
- Dagunduro, A. O., & Adenugba, A. A. (2024). Dynamics of Capital and Recurrent Household Expenditure among Female Breadwinners in Ibadan's Informal Markets. *Ibadan Journal of Sociology*, 15(1), 59-73.
- Dahal, P., Joshi, S. K., & Swahnberg, K. (2022). A qualitative study on gender inequality and gender-based violence in Nepal. *BMC public health*, 22(1), 2005. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14389-x>
- Dankwa, S. (2018). Culture of family ideals and perceived subjugating positions of women in patriarchy society: The way forward. *Culture (Québec)*, 8(24).
- De Singly, F. (2021). The family of individuals: An overview of the sociology of the family in Europe, 130 years after Durkheim's first university course. *The Palgrave handbook of family sociology in Europe*, 15-43. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73306-3_2

- Gerson, K. (2002). Moral dilemmas, moral strategies, and the transformation of gender: Lessons from two generations of work and family change. *Gender & society*, 16(1), 8-28.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1177/0891243202016001002>
- Giddens, A. (2009). *Sociology* (6th ed.). Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (2009). *Sociology* (6th ed.). Polity Press.
- Goldin, C. (2022). Understanding the economic impact of COVID-19 on women. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2022(1), 65-139.
- Graham, M., Weale, V., Lambert, K. A., Kinsman, N., Stuckey, R., & Oakman, J. (2021). Working at home: the impacts of COVID 19 on health, family-work-life conflict, gender, and parental responsibilities. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 63(11), 938-943.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/jom.0000000000002337>
- Kabeer, N. (2021). Gender equality, inclusive growth, and labour markets. In *Women's economic empowerment* (pp. 13-48). Routledge.
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & Society*, 2(3), 274-290.
- Kessler, L. T. (2000). The Attachment Gap: Employment Discrimination Law, Women's Cultural Caregiving, and the Limits of Economic and Liberal Legal Theory. *U. Mich. JL Reform*, 34, 371.
<https://doi.org/10.36646/mjlr.34.3.attachment>
- Kray, L. J., Kennedy, J. A., & Lee, M. (2024). Now, women do ask: A call to update beliefs about the gender pay gap. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 10(1), 11-37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/amd.2022.0021>
- Lombardozi, L. (2022). The marketisation of life: entangling social reproduction theory and regimes of patriarchy through women's work in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. *Review of International Political Economy*, 29(6), 1870-1893.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2021.1910063>
- McAuliff, A. K. (2022). Peace Negotiations as Sites of Gendered Power Hierarchies. *International Negotiation*, 28(2), 176-200.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-bja10072>
- Messerschmidt, J. W., & Bridges, T. (2024). Legitimation as linchpin: On Raewyn Connell's changing conceptualization of 'hegemonic masculinity'. *International Review of Sociology*, 34(2), 211-239.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2024.2388616>
- Mezzadri, A., Newman, S., & Stevano, S. (2022). Feminist global political economies of work and social reproduction. *Review of international political economy*, 29(6), 1783-1803.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2021.1957977>
- Miller, B., Carter, J., MacRae, C., & Schulz, B. (2021). A comparative analysis of attitudes towards female and male breadwinners in Germany, Sweden and the United States. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 30(3), 358-370.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.1872510>
- Miller, P. (2021). Gender and Generation in Thinking with Patriarchy. In *Gender and Generations: Continuity and Change* (pp. 15-33). Emerald Publishing Limited. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/S1529-212620210000030001>
- Ossome, L. (2021). Land in transition: from social reproduction of labour power to social reproduction of power. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 39(4),

- Platt, M. (2017). *Marriage, gender and Islam in Indonesia: Women negotiating informal marriage, divorce and desire*. Routledge.
- Rodriguez, S., & Conchas, G. Q. (Eds.). (2022). *Race frames in education: Structuring inequality and opportunity in a changing Society*. Teachers College Press.
- Sánchez-Mira, N. (2024). (Un) doing gender in female breadwinner households: Gender relations and structural change. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 31(4), 1196-1213. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12775>
- Swinth, K. (2018). *Feminism's forgotten fight: The unfinished struggle for work and family*. Harvard University Press.
- Utomo, I., & McDonald, P. (2016). Indonesia's middle class families: Marriage, work and care. *Asian Population Studies*, 12(2), 109–129.
- Van Wichelen, S. (2010). *Religion, politics and gender in Indonesia: Disputing the Muslim body*. Routledge.
- Walby, S. (1990). *Theorizing patriarchy*. Basil Blackwell.