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

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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 R² 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 study's conclusions shed light on how gender dynamics in contemporary Indonesian homes are ambivalent. On the one hand, there is an obvious shift in favor of greater equality, as evidenced by shifting perspectives on women's employment, financial sharing, and decision-making. However, ingrained patriarchal traditions still influence daily life, especially when it comes to expectations and roles in the home. What Walby (1990) refers to as the continuation of patriarchy through its adaptation to new social situations is shown in this ambivalence. Gender hierarchies within the home have not completely disappeared, despite the fact that modernity and urbanization have increased women's access to education and work. Rather, they have created what Bianchi et al. (2012) refer to as the "double burden" or "second shift," in which women are expected to juggle their obligations to their families and their careers. This dichotomy is seen in the pervasive notion in Indonesia that housework is still primarily the domain of women, while childcare is a shared obligation. The coexistence of conventional expectations and progressive aspirations emphasizes how patriarchal traditions have been reorganized but not completely eradicated by modernization.

This dynamic is consistent with observations made by Walby (1990) and Miller (2021) regarding the development of patriarchy in late modern societies, which see it becoming more quietly ingrained in social and cultural standards rather than blatantly forceful. For example, emotional support and home work are frequently accepted as women's moral obligations in many Indonesian households rather than being viewed as socially imposed disparities. Modern patriarchal structures, according to Messerschmidt and Bridges (2024), are maintained not just by overt dominance but also by cultural consent, in which men and women absorb distinct roles as "natural." These trends imply that the family is still a crucial location for the reproduction of symbolic gender hierarchy notwithstanding modernization. According to the findings, male spouses frequently see household involvement as "helping" rather than as an equitable division of responsibilities. Because it portrays household work as primarily the responsibility of women, this rhetoric of support perpetuates asymmetry. As a result, gender equality is still only partially achieved in everyday life, subject to certain conditions, and frequently negotiated within the confines of cultural norms.

At the same time, a change in the composition of family power dynamics is shown by the growing recognition of women's economic contributions. Many respondents

agreed that women's financial contributions are essential to the stability of families, especially in light of growing living expenses and the rise in dual-income homes. However, men are still seen as the main providers, maintaining their symbolic power in the household economy (Dagunduro & Adenugba, 2024; Sánchez-Mira, 2024). Kandiyoti's (1988) idea of the "patriarchal bargain," an implicit social compact in which women obtain conditional autonomy and public acknowledgment without actively opposing male power, can be used to explain this phenomena. These deals are seen in Indonesia, where women are allowed to work in public as long as it doesn't interfere with family peace or jeopardize the status of men. As a result, women's empowerment is presented as enhancing rather than contradicting men's positions. While maintaining stability in the home, this compromise also reduces the possibility of structural change. Therefore, gender equality in contemporary households functions less as a dramatic reconfiguration of power and more as a practical adaptation.

This study also reveals a slow shift in views toward egalitarianism from the standpoint of identity and generational transition, especially among younger couples. Numerous respondents stated that financial matters should be handled fairly and transparently between spouses, and that decision-making should be collaborative. This research backs up Giddens' (2009) concept of the "democratic family," where power dynamics are structured not by patriarchal authority but by communication, empathy, and compromise. However, the findings also show that ideals and practices continue to diverge. Although younger couples rhetorically support equality, when faced with time constraints, childcare requirements, or expectations from an extended family, they frequently fall back on traditional patterns. This contradiction highlights the transitory nature of Indonesian households, where gendered accountability norms and egalitarian goals coexist. As a result, the family becomes a place of ongoing compromise between conventional responsibilities and contemporary values.

Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity, which holds that dominant forms of masculinity are dynamic and continually reinterpreted in response to societal change, can also help explain such discrepancies. Though many still exercise moral or symbolic leadership in the home, males in Indonesia are beginning to acknowledge women's economic autonomy and intellectual capacity. The preservation of expressions like "head of the family" (*kepala keluarga*) illustrates how power is still gendered both linguistically and culturally. But the results also point to a growing flexibility and relationality in hegemonic masculinity. For example, men's involvement in parenting is frequently presented as a sign of partnership and care rather than authority. These changes demonstrate how masculinity itself is negotiating, with dominance being rearticulated through shared responsibility and emotional work as opposed to absolute authority.

This sociocultural interpretation is supported by the regression results, which indicate that women's involvement in public activities has a greater impact on views of gender equality than do their home duties. This suggests that women have more negotiating power and symbolic capital within the family when they participate in paid employment, education, and civic activities. This shift is explained by Connell's (2005) paradigm, which holds that the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity is undermined and reformed into more negotiated, reciprocal relationships as women become more visible in the public sphere. Equality in perception does not always equate to equality in experience, though, as seen by the continued existence of institutional hurdles including disparities in pay, inadequate childcare assistance, and an uneven distribution of household work. Therefore, adjustments to household arrangements, social norms, and institutional policies that more fairly allocate care obligations must support the empowerment attained via public engagement.

The results of this study imply that gender relations in Indonesia are not easily divided into traditional and modern cultural categories. Instead, they represent what academics like Miller et al. (2021) refer to as "hybrid configurations" of gender, in which contemporary values are superimposed over long-standing patriarchal structures. The fact that gendered practices and equality discourse coexist shows that family life transformation is evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Families pragmatically navigate gender norms by striking a balance between emotional goals, financial demands, and cultural expectations. In this way, the home becomes a microcosm of larger social change, mirroring the larger conflict between modernity and tradition in Indonesia.

These results also highlight how crucial it is to place gender relations within regional moral and cultural frameworks. In addition to economic development, communal values like gotong royong (mutual collaboration) and rukun (social harmony), which frequently place a higher priority on relational stability than individual autonomy, also influence Indonesian families. These principles have the potential to both promote and impede gender equality. They prevent overt disagreement or challenges to leadership, but they also promote interdependence and shared responsibility. Therefore, rather than using confrontation, the quest of equality frequently involves tactful compromise and discussion. What Kandiyoti (1988) called "adaptive patriarchy," in which power adapts to social change without completely renouncing its hierarchical underpinnings, is facilitated by this cultural mediation.

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.

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