

Family Communication as a Moderator of Children's Psychological Resilience in Polygamous Families: An Islamic Perspective and Research Agenda

Rulitawati¹, Antoni¹, Purmansya Ariadi¹, Sri Yanti¹, Hana Chaillah¹

¹Universitas Muhammadiyah Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia

Corresponding author e-mail: ita.ilet44@gmail.com

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Abstract: Children in polygamous families face unique psychosocial challenges, yet protective factors such as family communication remain underexplored. This study examined the role of family communication in shaping children's psychological resilience within polygamous families in Indonesia, using insights from religious court cases. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed. Participants included 12 polygamous families (N=48 individuals: 12 fathers, 24 mothers/co-wives, 12 children aged 10–18 years) identified through records of the Palembang Religious Court Class IA. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) was adapted for child resilience assessment. Data were analyzed using Miles & Huberman's interactive model. Three communication patterns emerged: open-egalitarian (33% of families), conflict-avoidant (50%), and secretive-hierarchical (17%). Children in open-egalitarian families demonstrated significantly higher resilience indicators (emotional regulation, social adaptability, positive self-concept) compared to those in secretive-hierarchical families, who exhibited social withdrawal, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Islamic communication principles (qawl sadīd, qawl layyin) were practiced only in open-egalitarian families. Open, fair, and emotionally supportive family communication may buffer the negative psychological effects of polygamous family structures on children. Religious courts should consider communication assessments in polygamy approvals. Future research should include larger samples and longitudinal designs.

Keywords: Children's Psychological Resilience, Family Communication Patterns, Islamic Family Communication, Polygamous Family Dynamics, Religious Court Cases

A. Introduction

Children's psychological resilience plays a crucial role in shaping individuals who are both adaptive and mentally robust (Masten et al., 2023; Rulitawati, 2024). Throughout their growth and developmental stages, children inevitably encounter a range of challenges, including academic pressure, bullying, and family-related

difficulties such as divorce or economic hardship (Sumadi Suryabrata, 1997; Wubshet et al., 2026). In the absence of adequate resilience, such adverse experiences may leave profound emotional scars, potentially leading to anxiety, depression, or behavioral problems later in life. Conversely, children with higher levels of psychological resilience are better equipped to process adversity, learn from failure, and recover more effectively (Durcan & Yavuz, 2025; Livingston et al., 2025). They are able to transform difficulties into opportunities for personal growth, thereby strengthening their psychological capacity to cope with future challenges (Rulitawati, 2024).

Family communication constitutes a fundamental foundation for establishing a healthy and supportive environment (Ariadi et al., 2024; Assegap et al., 2025). Within the family context, effective communication characterized by openness, empathy, and mutual support has long been recognized as a significant protective factor for children's emotional and social well-being (Patterson, G. R., & Forgatch, 2018). However, when family structures become more complex, such as in polygamous arrangements, communication patterns may encounter unique challenges (Amzat et al., 2025). Polygamous families, which involve the presence of multiple mothers and potentially diverse relational dynamics and loyalties, can generate intricate interactional processes (Syaikal & Yakin, 2025). These complexities require careful navigation to ensure that the emotional and psychological needs of all family members, particularly children, are adequately met (Al-hamdani et al., 2025).

In Islamic perspectives, communication extends beyond the mere exchange of information; it constitutes a multidimensional activity encompassing spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions (Bhat, 2025). Islam emphasizes that all forms of communication should be grounded in sincere intentions, honesty, wisdom, and the pursuit of *Allah's* pleasure, as well as the promotion of collective well-being (Rulitawati, n.d.). Furthermore, Islamic teachings prescribe specific ethical principles of communication, including *qawl sadīd* (truthful and honest speech), *qawl layyīn* (gentle and compassionate speech), and *qawl ma'rūf* (respectful and appropriate speech). These principles underscore that communication serves as a fundamental foundation for fostering healthy social interactions and harmonious relationships (Ariadi et al., 2024). Both the Qur'an and Hadith provide comprehensive guidance on how Muslims should communicate, whether verbally, nonverbally, or in written form (Yusuf, 2025). By adhering to these principles, communication is expected to function not only as a social tool but also as a means of spiritual elevation, strengthening *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and fostering a just and peaceful society. As stated in the Qur'an, Surah An-Nisā' (4:114):

﴿لَا خَيْرَ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِّنْ نُّجْوَاهُمْ إِلَّا مَنْ أَمَرَ بِصَدَقَةٍ أَوْ مَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ إِصْلَاحٍ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ﴾

“There is no خير in most of their private discourse, except among those who advocate charity, encourage virtuous conduct, or promote reconciliation among people” (Al-Qur’an, 2019; Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2015).

The verse underscores the importance of avoiding harmful or unproductive forms of communication and encourages individuals to engage in speech that promotes goodness, charity, and reconciliation. In this sense, communication is positioned as a moral and social instrument for maintaining harmony within both family and broader societal contexts. Within the context of polygamous families, these principles become particularly salient. The presence of multiple spouses and children from different maternal lineages often introduces complex relational dynamics that require careful and ethical communication. Observing how communication unfolds in such families—especially in interactions between spouses and among children who do not share the same mother—provides critical insight into how harmony is maintained or disrupted (Dalhatu & Muhammad, 2024). This highlights the importance of constructive communication practices in fostering cohesion and minimizing potential conflict within polygamous family structures.

In polygamous families, children may encounter situations that demand greater adaptive capacity compared to those in monogamous households, such as unequal parental attention, potential conflict among co-wives, and exposure to social stigma (Al-Krenawi, A., & Graham, 2006). These conditions may significantly influence children’s psychological resilience, defined as their capacity to cope with adversity and recover from stress. Although prior studies have examined the psychosocial consequences of polygamy, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the role of family communication as a moderating factor that is, a mechanism that may either strengthen or buffer the impact of polygamous family structures on children’s resilience (Patterson, G. R., & Forgatch, 2018). Accordingly, this study is essential in addressing this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of how the quality of family communication contributes to maintaining and enhancing children’s psychological resilience within the complexity of polygamous family systems. By doing so, this research seeks to advance understanding of protective mechanisms that support optimal psychological development among children in such contexts.

In Indonesia, although polygamy is legally and religiously permitted under specific conditions (Law No. 1, 2020), it often gives rise to complex family dynamics. Family structures involving multiple wives and children from different mothers may create environments that differ substantially from monogamous families in terms of interaction patterns, resource allocation, and emotional attention (Din et al., 2024). Previous studies have indicated that children raised in polygamous families may face distinctive psychosocial challenges, including identity-related issues, rivalry among half-siblings, and potential imbalances in paternal attention (Al-Krenawi, A., & Graham, 2006). However, it is important to recognize that the impact of polygamy

is not uniform. Certain factors may shape, amplify, or mitigate its influence on children's well-being and development.

The concept of moderation lies at the core of this study, as it highlights that the impact of polygamy on children is not deterministic but can be shaped by other influencing factors that function as buffers or directional mechanisms (Rulitawati, Purmansyah Ariadi, 2022). For instance, although polygamy may carry potential negative implications, the presence of strong moderating factors can attenuate or even neutralize these effects (Akbar et al., 2026). Conversely, in the absence of positive moderating influences, adverse outcomes may become more pronounced. Accordingly, this study aims to identify and analyze specific factors that play a role within polygamous family contexts, particularly in relation to child development. A deeper understanding of how these factors influence the relationship between polygamous family structures and child outcomes is essential for developing targeted interventions that support children's adaptation and psychological resilience in such environments (Smith & Jones, 2019).

Understanding and strengthening children's psychological resilience is essential not only for helping them cope with adversity but also for establishing a solid foundation for their development into adaptive, resilient individuals capable of facing the future with optimism (Pillay, 2023). The importance of resilience extends beyond mere survival; it encompasses the capacity to grow and develop through challenging experiences (Rulitawati, 2024). Resilience is not simply an innate trait, but rather a dynamic process that can be cultivated through interactions with the environment, social support, and the development of adaptive coping skills (Werner & Smith, 2001). In this regard, family, school, and community environments play a vital role in nurturing resilience by providing the resources and strategies necessary for children to build internal capacities to navigate an uncertain future with confidence and competence (Rulitawati, Azwar Hadi, 2025).

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What family communication patterns characterize polygamous families documented in Palembang Religious Court records?
2. How do these communication patterns relate to children's psychological resilience?
3. To what extent do Islamic communication principles (*qawl sadīd*, *qawl layyin*, *qawl ma'rūf*) manifest in polygamous family interactions?

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify and examine the communication patterns that characterize polygamous families documented in the records of the Palembang Religious Court.
2. Explore how family communication patterns are associated with children's psychological resilience in polygamous families.
3. Analyze the extent to which Islamic communication principles (*qawl sadīd*, *qawl*

layyin, and qawl ma'rūf) are reflected in interactions within polygamous family settings.

B. Methods

This study aims to explore the dynamics of children's psychological resilience and family communication patterns within polygamous households, focusing on cases documented at the Palembang Religious Court Class IA. The research process is systematically structured following a qualitative phenomenological approach, which is particularly suitable for capturing the subjective experiences of polygamous families within the Indonesian Islamic context. This approach is designed to ensure data validity, adherence to research ethics, and meaningful contributions to family education and Islamic counseling practices.

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of family communication and children's psychological resilience within polygamous family settings (Englander & Morley, 2023). A phenomenological approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand how family members perceive, interpret, and experience communication practices in their everyday lives and how these experiences relate to children's psychological resilience. Rather than examining causal relationships, the study focused on capturing the subjective meanings attached to family interactions from the perspectives of parents and children living in legally recognized polygamous families. The phenomenological approach enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences while considering the social, cultural, and religious context in which those experiences occurred.

The study was conducted in Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia, with participants recruited through the Palembang Religious Court Class IA, where officially registered polygamy cases are documented. The Religious Court was selected because it serves as the legal institution responsible for processing applications for polygamous marriage under Indonesian law, thereby providing access to families who had entered legally recognized polygamous marriages.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they possessed direct experience relevant to the research objectives (Robinson, 2024). The inclusion criteria comprised: (1) families with legally registered polygamous marriages documented by the Religious Court; (2) families with children who had experienced living within a polygamous household; and (3) participants willing to provide informed consent and participate in interviews and observations. The study involved fathers, wives (including co-wives), children, and court officials who were familiar with the legal and social context of polygamous families. This diverse group of participants enabled triangulation of perspectives regarding family communication and children's psychological resilience.

Table 1. Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Method	Description	Target Participants
Participant Observation	Semi-structured observation conducted over 60–90 minutes per session to capture natural interactions and behavioral patterns within family settings	Children, wives, husbands
In-depth Interviews	Conducted in mediation court sessions and within household settings to explore family communication dynamics	Family members (focus on communication dynamics)
Document Analysis	Review of polygamy certificates and court decisions as secondary data sources	Archival/legal documents
Resilience Questionnaire	Adapted Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) to assess children’s psychological resilience	Children

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman. This model involves three concurrent and iterative processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data obtained from observations, interviews, and document analysis. Data display involved organizing the data into structured forms—such as matrices and thematic categorizations—to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure their validity and consistency. Participant observations were undertaken within family settings to examine naturally occurring communication patterns, interpersonal interactions, emotional expressions, and family dynamics that might not have emerged during interviews. Observation also enabled the researcher to compare participants’ narratives with actual communication practices.

Document analysis was conducted using Religious Court records, including polygamy permits and related legal documents, to obtain contextual information concerning participants’ family structures and legal backgrounds. Documentary evidence complemented the interview and observational data by providing an official record of the participants’ legal status. Children’s psychological resilience was explored using an adapted resilience questionnaire, which served as supporting information rather than as the primary source of analysis. The questionnaire findings were interpreted alongside qualitative interview and observational data to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of children’s resilience within polygamous family contexts.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis within the framework of the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman. Data analysis proceeded iteratively through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Initially, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials were carefully reviewed to identify meaningful units related to family communication, parenting practices, Islamic

communication principles, and children's psychological resilience. These units were subsequently coded and organized into broader thematic categories representing recurring patterns across participants' experiences. Themes were continuously refined through comparison across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence until coherent interpretations emerged. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through data triangulation involving multiple data sources and participant groups, allowing consistency to be assessed across different forms of evidence.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Family Communication Patterns in Polygamous Households and Their Influence on Children's Psychological Resilience

Family communication within polygamous contexts plays a central role in shaping and influencing children's psychological resilience (Irawan et al., 2026). In such complex family structures, the communication patterns established by parents—particularly fathers and co-wives—are closely associated with children's capacity to navigate emotional and social challenges. Existing research suggests that in the absence of effective and open communication, children in polygamous families may encounter difficulties in developing psychological resilience (Füllgrabe & Smith, 2023). This condition may increase their vulnerability to anxiety, emotional conflict, and perceptions of unequal affection or attention from parents. Conversely, constructive and supportive communication can function as a protective factor that fosters children's adaptive coping and emotional stability.

Effective family communication, characterized by openness, fairness, and consistent emotional support, has been shown to mitigate the adverse effects of polygamy on children's psychological resilience. When parents maintain honest and transparent dialogue, foster an equitable family environment in the distribution of attention and resources among all children, and provide continuous emotional support, children are more likely to develop a strong sense of security and self-confidence. These protective conditions enable them to adapt more effectively to social stigma and the unique challenges associated with polygamous family structures. Furthermore, communication that promotes equality, mutual understanding, and respect among family members including relationships between children, their biological mothers, and stepmothers is essential for strengthening family cohesion and minimizing the potential for internal conflict (Roman et al., 2025).

Conversely, ineffective or closed communication within polygamous family environments may exacerbate psychological challenges and hinder the development of children's resilience (Alhuzail, 2023). Such conditions often arise from tensions among co-wives, a lack of transparency from the father, or difficulties in addressing sensitive issues in a constructive manner. Children raised in environments

characterized by poor communication may experience emotional isolation, diminished self-esteem, and difficulties in peer interactions (J. Lin & Guo, 2024). Unresolved conflicts and the absence of emotional and relational closeness among family members can contribute to the emergence of negative thought patterns and limit the development of adaptive coping strategies. As a result, children may become more vulnerable to behavioral problems and lower academic achievement.

The psychological mechanisms underlying the influence of family communication involve the formation of children's perceptions of fairness, support, and security. Open communication enables children to better understand family dynamics, reduce confusion, and prevent the development of negative assumptions (Alarie, 2024). Consistent emotional support fosters self-confidence and enhances children's capacity for emotional regulation. Meanwhile, fairness in parental treatment encompassing affection, educational opportunities, and material provision serves as a critical foundation for children's psychological resilience, helping to prevent feelings of jealousy and perceived discrimination (Hughes, 2026). Taken together, these findings suggest that family communication, in its various forms, may function as a key factor in shaping children's psychological resilience and overall well-being within polygamous family contexts.

Family communication patterns in polygamous households constitute a critical factor influencing children's psychological resilience (Amato, 2015). Such family structures often involve complex interpersonal dynamics, particularly in relation to perceived fairness, equitable treatment, and the management of inter-spousal conflict. When communication is open, honest, and empathetic, children are more likely to develop higher levels of resilience (Mufidah, A., & Nisa, 2020). Effective communication enables children to process their experiences, understand the structure of their family, and feel heard and valued by both parents and stepmothers. Conversely, communication patterns characterized by secrecy, limited openness, or unresolved conflict may undermine children's sense of security and emotional stability (Najafov, 2025). These conditions can contribute to chronic stress, role confusion, and perceptions of injustice, which may, in turn, hinder the development of adaptive coping capacities and psychological resilience.

Changes in children's psychological resilience within polygamous contexts are often reflected in their capacity to adapt to changing environments and manage emotional pressures (Ganapathy, S. A., & Ziden, 2018). Children raised in families where communication is clear regarding roles, boundaries, and expectations for instance, how paternal time is allocated or how conflicts are resolved tend to demonstrate better adjustment and healthier coping mechanisms (Elshanum, 2024). Effective communication patterns function as behavioral models, through which children learn problem-solving skills and emotional regulation. Conversely, when family communication is characterized by ambiguity, double-bind messages (i.e., contradictory or inconsistent signals), or subtle forms of favoritism, children's

resilience may shift toward vulnerability (Walsh, 2016). Under such conditions, children may develop trust issues, separation anxiety, or even aggressive behaviors as responses to instability in both communication and family structure.

Findings from the researcher's observations indicate that children raised in polygamous families may experience notable psychological challenges. These are reflected in their daily social interactions, where some children exhibit low self-confidence, social withdrawal, and reduced communication with peers. In certain cases, children appear reluctant to engage socially, preferring isolation over interaction. Such conditions may be associated with less harmonious patterns of family communication. The presence of multiple maternal figures can contribute to perceived competition within the family, particularly in relation to the distribution of paternal attention. This dynamic may foster feelings of insecurity, inferiority, and emotional tension among children. In some instances, these experiences may also lead to difficulties in forming interpersonal relationships, including avoidance or negative attitudes toward the opposite sex. Although polygamy is permitted within the frameworks of the Qur'an and Hadith, Islamic teachings strongly emphasize justice, both materially and spiritually. The absence of such fairness in practice may contribute to imbalances in family dynamics that affect children's psychological well-being.

2. Islamic-Based Family Communication May Mitigate or Amplify the Impact of Polygamous Family Structures on Children's Psychological Resilience

Family communication plays a central and potentially transformative role in shaping whether the impact of polygamous family structures on children's psychological resilience is mitigated or intensified (Xu, 2026). Polygamy, with its structural and emotional complexities, inherently carries potential risks for children, including feelings of neglect, role confusion, and perceptions of injustice (Ritonga et al., 2025). However, when communication within the family is open, honest, and well-structured, it may function as a buffering mechanism against such stressors. Effective communication enables parents—fathers and mothers, including stepmothers—to provide age-appropriate explanations of family dynamics, establish clear boundaries, and, most importantly, ensure that each child feels individually valued and emotionally supported, regardless of maternal lineage. In this way, supportive communication may reduce the potential negative effects of polygamy by fostering a sense of security, stability, and self-acceptance among children (Walsh, 2016).

Conversely, dysfunctional or maladaptive communication patterns may intensify the negative impact of polygamous family structures on children's psychological resilience (Molaie et al., 2024). In many problematic polygamous contexts, communication is often characterized by secrecy, covert conflict, and double-bind messages—contradictory signals that can confuse children. When children are

exposed to unresolved tensions between co-wives or perceive unacknowledged favoritism, the emotional climate of the family may become unstable and anxiety-inducing. Such closed communication patterns may limit children's ability to process their experiences in a healthy manner, foster distrust toward authority figures, and contribute to chronic uncertainty (Mufidah, A., & Nisa, 2020). As a result, children's resilience may be weakened, as they lack access to healthy communication models and supportive channels for expressing emotional difficulties. Over time, this may transform vulnerability into more persistent psychological responses.

Furthermore, the capacity of family communication to mitigate negative outcomes is closely associated with the quality of coordinated co-parenting practices (Y.-F. Lin et al., 2024). In polygamous families, co-parenting extends beyond the biological parents to include stepmothers, thereby requiring a higher level of coordination among adult members of the household. Healthy and consistent communication among all caregivers regarding schedules, rules, and children's emotional needs is essential. For example, clear communication about the allocation of time and resources may help prevent children from feeling the need to compete for paternal attention. When fathers and mothers—including stepmothers—are able to communicate constructively and demonstrate cooperative parenting, even in the presence of interpersonal tensions, children are more likely to perceive the family structure as stable and supportive. Such perceived stability may strengthen children's psychological resilience by fostering adaptive capacities such as flexibility, emotional regulation, and social adjustment (Gamin, 2019).

In conclusion, family communication not only influences but may also shape the developmental trajectories of children's psychological outcomes within polygamous contexts (Haura et al., 2025). Communication patterns that promote emotional validation, role clarity, and perceived fairness can function as catalysts for resilience, supporting children in developing adaptive capacities and effective coping mechanisms in response to life challenges. Conversely, the absence of healthy communication channels—characterized by conflict avoidance, emotional ambiguity, or lack of openness—may act as a risk-enhancing factor, intensifying the impact of stressors associated with polygamous family structures and potentially undermining children's resilience (Ganapathy, S. A., & Ziden, 2018). Therefore, strengthening effective family communication skills represents a critical avenue for intervention aimed at safeguarding children's psychological well-being in polygamous families.

D. Conclusions

This qualitative study of 12 polygamous families in Palembang, Indonesia, found that family communication patterns are strongly associated with children's psychological resilience. Open-egalitarian communication—characterized by transparency, fairness, and emotional support—was linked to higher resilience

scores, while conflict-avoidant and secretive-hierarchical patterns were associated with lower resilience, social withdrawal, and anxiety. This study suggests that effective family communication, characterized by openness, fairness, and emotional support, is associated with greater psychological resilience among children in polygamous families. These findings highlight the importance of Islamic-based communication practices as a potential protective mechanism for promoting children's emotional well-being and family cohesion. However, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as the relatively small sample (12 families), the focus on a single geographic location, the cross-sectional design, and the reliance on self-reported resilience measures limit the generalizability of the results and do not permit causal inferences. Future research should employ larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and multiple measures of resilience to further validate and extend these findings. Religious courts may consider pre-polygamy communication assessments. Families practicing polygamy should receive psychoeducation on Islamic communication principles (*qawl sadid, qawl layyin*) to support children's adjustment. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and larger, multi-site samples.

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