

Adolescent autonomy: Role of father's involvement and family functioning

Otonomi remaja: Peran keterlibatan ayah dan fungsi keluarga

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a transitional period marked by increasing self direction. This study examined whether father involvement and family functioning are associated with adolescent autonomy. Using multistage cluster sampling across several districts/cities in Central Java, Indonesia, we analysed survey data from 929 adolescents aged 12–19 years. Participants completed validated scales of adolescent autonomy, family functioning, and father involvement. Statistical analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping technique to test the strength of the relationship and its effects. The results indicated that both family functioning and father involvement had a significant positive relationship with adolescent autonomy. Increased family functioning and active father involvement were associated with higher levels of autonomy in adolescents. Findings suggest that adolescents tend to report higher autonomy in supportive family climates with engaged fathers, informing family based strategies to strengthen self regulation and decision making. These insights provide practical implications for strengthening adolescent psychosocial development through family-based interventions.

ABSTRAK

Masa remaja merupakan periode transisi dengan peningkatan pengarahan diri. Studi ini menguji apakah keterlibatan ayah dan keberfungsian keluarga berasosiasi dengan otonomi remaja. Dengan teknik klaster bertingkat di beberapa kabupaten/kota di Jawa Tengah, Indonesia, dianalisis data survei dari 929 remaja usia 12–19 tahun. Partisipan mengisi skala teruji untuk kemandirian remaja, keberfungsian keluarga, dan keterlibatan ayah. Analisis data menggunakan teknik bootstrapping untuk menguji kekuatan hubungan dan pengaruh antar variabel. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keberfungsian keluarga dan keterlibatan ayah memiliki hubungan positif yang signifikan terhadap kemandirian remaja. Semakin tinggi keberfungsian keluarga dan keterlibatan ayah, maka semakin tinggi pula tingkat kemandirian remaja. Temuan menyiratkan bahwa remaja cenderung melaporkan otonomi lebih tinggi pada iklim keluarga yang suportif dengan ayah yang terlibat, sehingga mendukung strategi berbasis keluarga untuk memperkuat regulasi diri dan pengambilan keputusan. Implikasi praktis dari penelitian ini dapat dijadikan dasar dalam merancang intervensi berbasis keluarga untuk mendukung perkembangan psikososial remaja secara optimal.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitional period characterized by biological, cognitive, and socioemotional changes that require the consolidation of autonomy (Putri et al., 2024). Indonesian adolescents are navigating the school-to-work transition, a process that is frequently facing challenges. Several findings suggest that a substantial share of Indonesian adolescents have not yet reached an optimal level of autonomy. Using official School Enrollment Rates (*Angka Partisipasi Sekolah* or APS) for ages 16–18 in Central Java (Susenas 2023), we observe substantial variation across the study's clusters: Kudus 66.27%, Jepara 68.21%, Demak 73.12%, Grobogan 56.22%, Rembang 75.45%, Pati 69.66%, and Semarang City 69.53%; the provincial average is 70.87% (BPS Central Java, updated 6 March 2024). Lower APS at these ages indicates a larger share of youth out of school and may be associated with delayed completion of upper secondary education and reduced work readiness; taken together, these official indicators depict a risk of a delayed transition to independence (school to work) that, in some contexts, coincides with fewer opportunities to develop psychological autonomy (Steinberg, 2023).

Preliminary assessments with three adolescents revealed the variability of autonomy experiences based on family structure to illustrate this challenge more concretely. GL (17), raised by a single mother, felt dependent and lacked decision-making space. AU (15), came from a warm, communicative family, felt empowered to express herself. MK (13), whose father passed away and mother is often absent, expressed confusion in making independent choices. These narratives highlight how the family environment (particularly structure, support, and parental engagement) shapes adolescents' capacity for self-governance. Additionally, these portraits underscore the salience of family dynamics for autonomy development.

Low autonomy is associated with developmental risks, including indecision, poor emotional regulation, identity confusion, and susceptibility to negative peer influence (Widodo & Pandjaitan, 2019; Giannotti et al., 2025). On the contrary, higher autonomy fosters identity clarity, resilience, academic engagement, and life satisfaction. Supporting autonomy during adolescence is therefore not only developmentally appropriate but also essential for psychosocial well-being.

A range of family-based factors significantly influences autonomy development, including parenting style, parental warmth, decision-making opportunities, family cohesion, and parent-child communication (Sunarty, 2016; Li et al., 2020). Healthy family functioning (marked by mutual respect, open dialogue, and emotional responsiveness) provides adolescents with the fundamentals for independent decision-making (Smilkstein, 1978; Mulyati & Martiastuti, 2019). Among these, father involvement is increasingly recognized as a key determinant, especially in societies where paternal roles are traditionally limited.

Theoretical frameworks such as family systems theory and self-determination theory position family functioning and father involvement as proximal factors in autonomy development (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Pleck, 2010). High-quality paternal engagement is defined by accessibility, responsibility, and interactive support. This has been shown to foster emotional

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security and personal agency (Wang et al., 2022). While maternal roles are often emphasized, fathers' presence and meaningful involvement can uniquely model independence and reinforce adolescent self-efficacy, particularly in culturally patriarchal contexts (Giannotti et al., 2025; Ruby, 2025).

A growing body of international and local research supports the positive effect of both family functioning and father involvement on adolescent autonomy. For instance, Yoo (2021) found that father involvement amplified the positive effect of family functioning on autonomy. Li et al. (2020) demonstrated that adolescents from cohesive, emotionally responsive families displayed higher self-determination and maturity. Ruby (2025) revealed that parent training programs significantly improved involvement among housewives but were less effective for working mothers, indicating structural challenges in sustaining engagement.

Despite the empirical support, few studies in Indonesia have jointly tested the role of father involvement and family functioning within a unified predictive model. Existing research often isolates these variables or disproportionately focuses on maternal contributions. Moreover, little is known about how these dynamics function in Central Java, a culturally distinct and demographically diverse region. This study addresses these gaps by investigating how both factors, individually and interactively, predict adolescent autonomy using clustered, representative samples and robust bootstrapping analysis.

Accordingly, study aims to test whether family functioning and father involvement predict adolescent autonomy in a Central Java sample. Specifically, three hypotheses were proposed: family functioning and father involvement jointly predict adolescent autonomy; family functioning positively correlates with adolescent autonomy; and father involvement positively correlates with adolescent autonomy.

2. METHODS

Design

This research utilized a cluster sampling technique, in which schools from several districts in Central Java (including Pati, Kudus, Jepara, Demak, Purwodadi, Grobogan, Semarang, and Rembang) were selected as clusters. Students aged 12–19 years within these schools were invited to participate as respondents.

Participants

The participants of this study were adolescents aged 12 to 19 years, recruited through a multistage cluster sampling technique. In the first stage, several districts in Central Java Province (including Pati, Kudus, Jepara, Demak, Purwodadi, Grobogan, Semarang, and Rembang) were selected as the geographical clusters. Several schools were chosen based on accessibility and approval to participate within each selected district. In the final stage, students within the selected schools who met the inclusion criteria were invited with aged

between 12 and 19 years, currently enrolled in high school, willing to participate voluntarily by completing the questionnaire, residing in one of the selected districts (e.g., Kudus, Jepara, etc.). This approach was considered appropriate given the wide geographical coverage and the impracticality of compiling a complete sampling frame of all adolescents across the region. A total of 989 students initially participated in the study; however, only 929 responses were included in the final analysis due to incomplete questionnaire submissions.

Instruments

In this study, the instruments used were original instruments developed by the researchers. Data collection was carried out using three psychometric instruments specifically designed to measure the variables under study: adolescent autonomy, family functioning, and father involvement. Each instrument was selected and developed based on a construction process and theoretical framework that had been tested and validated for use in adolescent populations.

Data collection was conducted conventionally using the paper-and-pencil method. In this process, questionnaires were printed on paper and distributed directly to respondents. Respondents then filled out the questionnaires manually using the writing instruments provided. This method was chosen to facilitate data collection in the field and accommodate respondents who may have limited access to digital technology or the internet.

The Adolescent Autonomy Scale was developed based on (Steinberg, 2023) conceptualization of autonomy, encompassing emotional, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions. This scale consisted of 17 items, each item reflecting various aspects of independence and decision-making capacity in adolescents.

The Family Functioning Scale was developed based on the APGAR model introduced by (Smilkstein, 1978), measuring five core domains of family functioning: adaptability, partnership, growth, affection, and resolve. This scale contained 26 items, aimed at capturing adolescents' perceptions of family interactions and relational dynamics.

The Father Involvement Scale was developed based on the framework proposed by Lamb and elaborated by (Pleck, 2010). It includes 36 items covering three dimensions: paternal engagement (active interaction), accessibility (availability to the child), and responsibility (fulfillment of parenting duties).

All instruments utilized a 4-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), as recommended by (Azwar, 2022) with the neutral response category intentionally removed to minimize ambiguity in responses. The instruments were designed to ensure clarity, cultural relevance, and psychometric soundness for the Indonesian adolescent population.

Measurements

Each of the three research variables was measured using a distinct and theoretically grounded scale with adequate internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha

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coefficients. The Adolescent Autonomy Scale demonstrated a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.754$, suggesting acceptable internal consistency. The scale assessed the degree to which adolescents perceive themselves as capable of independent thinking, feeling, and acting. Adolescent Autonomy has a validity ranging from 0.690 to 0.800. The Family Functioning Scale achieved a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.862$. This high level of reliability indicates that the items consistently measured the quality of family interaction, cohesion, and support as perceived by the adolescent respondents. Family Functioning has a validity ranging from 0.820 to 0.940. The Father Involvement Scale showed excellent internal consistency with $\alpha = 0.945$, reflecting the consistency of responses across items measuring the quantity and quality of fathers' engagement in parenting. Father Involvement has a validity ranging from 0.700 to 0.830. The reliability of these scales was tested using Cronbach's alpha formula, implemented through the SPSS 26 software.

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique in this study used multiple regression model with include bootstrapping method, repeated 1000 times with the help of the SPSS 26 application for Windows. Bootstrapping is a statistical technique increasingly used in psychological research to estimate the sampling distribution of a statistic. It involves repeatedly resampling with replacement from the original dataset to create multiple simulated samples. Bootstrapping can be applied to various statistical analyses, including correlation, regression, and mediation models. It provides more robust confidence intervals and p-values, enhancing the reliability of statistical inferences. Recent studies have demonstrated its effectiveness in improving the accuracy of effect size estimates and reducing Type I error rates in psychological research (Jones et al., 2020).

3. RESULTS

Table 1 Descriptive statistic

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Family Functioning	929	35	100	73.86	10.341
Father Involvement	929	42	144	106.67	17.897
Adolescent Autonomy	929	23	67	52.20	5.914
Valid N (listwise)	929				

Based on Table 1. the findings from the descriptive analysis demonstrate family functioning have a mean of 73.9 (SD= 10.34; Min= 35; Max= 100) where the level of family functioning in participants is at a medium level (37.8%). Father involvement variable has a mean of 106.67 (SD= 17.90; Min= 42; Max= 144) where the level of father involvement is at a medium level (48.76%). Meanwhile, the adolescent autonomy has a mean of 52.2 (SD= 5.91; Min= 23; Max= 67) and the level of adolescent autonomy in this study is at a medium level (45.75%).

Table 2 Bivariate Correlation Analysis

		Adolescent Autonomy	Father In- volvement	Family Functioning	
Adolescent Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	1	.376**	.358**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	
	N	929	929	929	
	Bias	0	.000	.001	
	Std. Error	0	.040	.035	
	Bootstrap ^b	Bca 95% Confidence Interval	Lower	.286	.280
		Upper		.452	.433
Father In- volvement	Pearson Correlation	.376**	1	.520**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	
	N	929	929	929	
	Bias	.000	0	.000	
	Std. Error	.040	0	.036	
	Bootstrap ^b	Bca 95% Confidence Interval	Lower	.286	.440
		Upper	.452		.590
Family Func- tioning	Pearson Correlation	.358**	.520**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	929	929	929	
	Bias	.001	.000	0	
	Std. Error	.035	.036	0	
	Bootstrap ^b	Bca 95% Confidence Interval	Lower	.280	.440
		Upper	.433	.590	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

b. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap result is based on 1000 bootstrap samples

The results of bivariate correlation analysis using bootstrap demonstrated a sizable correlation between family functioning and adolescent independence ($r= 0.358$; $p= 0.000$) as well as between father involvement and adolescent independence also showed a significant positive relationship ($r= 0.376$; $p= 0.000$).

Table 3 Bootstrapping Regression Analysis

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.421 ^a	.177	.176	5.369

a. Predictors: (Constant), Father Involvement, Family Functioning

Bootstrap for Coefficients						
Model	B	Bias	Std. Error	Sig. (2-tailed)	BCa 95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
(Constant)	33.629	.009	1.924	.001	29.580	37.499
1 Family Functioning	.127	-.001	.024	.001	.079	.172
Father Involvement	.086	.000	.017	.001	.054	.122

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

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According to the findings, the bootstrap regression analysis in this research shows that family functioning is positively correlated with adolescent autonomy and has a significant effect ($B= 0.127$ CI [0.079; 0.172], $SE= 0.024$, $p= 0.001$). This indicates that higher levels of family functioning are associated with greater adolescent autonomy, while lower family functioning corresponds with reduced autonomy. Father's involvement is also positively correlated with adolescent autonomy and has a very significant effect ($B= 0.086$ CI [0.054; 0.122], $SE=0.017$, $p= 0.001$).

This means that the higher the level of father involvement, the higher the adolescent's level of autonomy, and vice versa, the lower the father's level of involvement, the lower the adolescent's level of autonomy. Collectively, family functioning and father involvement influence adolescent autonomy by 17.7%. Meanwhile, the other 82.3% were influenced by other factors not examined in this study.

Table 4 Adolescent autonomy categorization

Score Intervals	Categorization	Empirical Mean	Hypothetical Mean	Frequency	Percentage (%)
$X \geq 61$	Very high			55	5.9
$55 \leq X \leq 61$	High			258	27.8
$49 \leq X \leq 55$	Moderate	52.2		425	45.75
$43 \leq X \leq 49$	Low Very			151	16.25
$X \leq 43$	Low		42.5	40	4.31
Total				929	100

The adolescent autonomy in this study was at a moderate level. A total of 55 adolescents (5.9%) had very high autonomy, 258 adolescents (27.8%) had high autonomy, 425 adolescents (45.75%) had moderate autonomy, 151 adolescents (16.25%) had low autonomy, and 40 adolescents (4.31%) have very low autonomy.

The empirical mean value of 52.2 indicates that the average adolescent autonomy in this study is in the moderate category ($49 \leq X < 55$). This value is higher than the hypothetical means of 42.5, which means that the general level of adolescent autonomy is above the theoretical average. However, despite being above the neutral point, adolescent autonomy is still classified as moderate.

Table 5 Family functioning categorization

Score Intervals	Categorization	Empirical Mean	Hypothetical Mean	Frequency	Percentage (%)
$X \geq 89$	Very high			48	5.17
$79 \leq X \leq 89$	High			276	29.7
$69 \leq X \leq 79$	Moderate	73.9		351	37.78
$58 \leq X \leq 69$	Low Very		65	191	20.56
$X \leq 58$	Low			63	6.78
Total				929	100

Family functioning in this study was at a moderate level. There were 48 adolescents with very high family functioning (5.17%), 276 adolescents with high family functioning (29.7%), 351 adolescents with moderate family functioning (37.78%), 191 adolescents with low family functioning (20.56%), and adolescents with very low family functioning were 63 teenagers (6.78%).

The empirical mean of 73.9 is in the moderate category, which indicates that in general the family functioning of adolescents in this study is quite good. This value is higher than the hypothetical mean of 65, so it can be concluded that adolescents' perceptions of their family functioning are above the theoretically expected average standard, although it has not reached the high category.

Table 6 Father Involvement Categorization

Score Intervals	Categorization	Empirical Mean	Hypothetical Mean	Frequency	Percentage (%)
$X \geq 134$	Very high			36	3.88
$116 \leq X \leq 133$	High			223	24
$98 \leq X \leq 115$	Moderate	106.67		453	48.76
$80 \leq X \leq 97$	Low Very		90	146	15.72
$X \leq 79$	Low			71	7.64
Total				929	100

Father involvement in this study was at a moderate level. There were 36 adolescents with very high father involvement (3.88%), 223 adolescents with high father involvement (24%), 453 adolescents with moderate father involvement (48.76%), 146 adolescents with low father involvement (15.72%), and adolescents with very low father involvement were 71 adolescents (7.64%).

The empirical mean of father involvement of 106.67 indicates that in general the level of father involvement is in the moderate category. This value is higher than the hypothetical mean of 90, which means that adolescents' perceptions of father involvement are above the expected theoretical mean. Although it has not yet reached the high category, it reflects the presence of sufficient father participation in the child's life, although it may still be improved.

4. DISCUSSION

This study examined whether father involvement and family functioning are associated with adolescent autonomy. Consistent with the hypotheses, both constructs showed independent positive associations with autonomy in a clustered sample of Indonesian adolescents. Although the overall effect was small to moderate, the pattern was robust across bootstrap resamples, supporting the interpretation that adolescents tend to report higher autonomy in well functioning families where fathers are actively engaged. Parent training that scaffolds positive parenting competencies appears to modify maternal involvement in

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early childhood; adapting similar, culturally anchored content to more directly engage fathers may complement our findings on family functioning and father involvement (Ruby, 2025).

These findings are consistent with various previous studies showing that adolescent autonomy increases along with improvements in family functioning and father involvement (Carlson, 2006; Hidayati & Kaloeti, 2011; Karabanova & Poskrebysheva, 2013; Everri et al., 2015; Kocayörük, 2016; Li et al., 2018; Mulyati & Martiastuti, 2019; Mastrotheodoros et al., 2020; Yoo, 2021). Conversely, inadequate family functioning hampers autonomy development. Healthy family functioning, characterized by effective communication, mutual respect, and age-appropriate decision-making opportunities, provides a secure foundation for adolescents to explore their autonomy (Lazzaro et al., 2023).

Supportive family environments have also been proven to encourage positive social behaviors, involvement in religious activities, better decision-making, and respect for authority (Belintxon et al., 2020; Lubis & Hasanuddin, 2023). Even in dysfunctional family dynamics, parental supervision and clear parental roles can still promote the growth of adolescent responsibility (Everri et al., 2015). Autonomy signals readiness for adulthood, and its absence can result in dependence, indecisiveness, and identity confusion (Mulyati & Martiastuti, 2019). Highly autonomous adolescents usually come from families with less control and more democratic, respectful interactions (Karabanova & Poskrebysheva, 2013). The selective effectiveness (significant among housewives but not working mothers) suggests structural constraints on parental engagement by employment status; tailoring program delivery and dosage may be necessary for working parents (Ruby, 2025).

The results of this study reinforce the view that autonomy is an important aspect of adolescent psychosocial well-being (Beyers et al., 2025). Parental involvement, especially fathers, helps adolescents make independent life decisions. As adolescents grow older, effective family dynamics become increasingly important in shaping identity and emotional resilience (Shifflet-Chila et al., 2016; Li et al., 2018). However, unlike studies that emphasize only the father's physical presence, this study highlights that the quality of the father-child relationship is more crucial in shaping autonomy (Wang et al., 2022).

In addition, technological advancements have expanded adolescents' social spaces beyond family and community, making adolescent identity formation more complex (Shifflet-Chila et al., 2016). Weak family communication can contribute to negative outcomes such as FoMO (fear of missing out) and online dependency (Ruby et al., 2022; Ruby et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, father involvement in supporting voluntary independent actions has been proven to increase decision-making ability, reduce delinquent behavior, and strengthen adolescents' cognitive, emotional, and social competencies (Carlson, 2006; Kocayörük, 2016; Parmanti & Purnamasari, 2015; Aisyah et al., 2019; Risnawati et al., 2021). The interaction between father involvement and family functioning creates a synergistic effect on adolescent autonomy (Yoo, 2021), although cultural variations exist in how this influence manifests (Cheung et al., 2023).

This study confirms that high levels of father involvement and healthy family functioning positively predict adolescent autonomy. The study has several limitations. Limitations include reliance on cross sectional self reports and a student based sample from selected districts, which may limit generalizability. Unmeasured influences (such as peers, school climate, or online contexts) may also contribute to autonomy. Future research could adopt multi informant, multi method, and longitudinal designs; incorporate peer and school covariates; and examine potential moderators (e.g., gender, urban-rural residence).

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that father involvement and family functioning have a significant influence on adolescent autonomy. Adolescents who grow up in families with healthy communication, clear parental roles, and a quality father-child relationship tend to exhibit higher levels of autonomy. These findings reinforce the understanding that autonomy is a key indicator of adolescents' readiness for adulthood, and that the quality of family interactions (especially the father's role) plays a central role in shaping adolescent independence. The implication of these findings suggests that interventions aimed at enhancing adolescent autonomy should focus on strengthening father involvement and improving overall family functioning.

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