

## INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN RESTORING SELF-ESTEEM AFTER FAILING TO GAIN ADMISSION TO THEIR DREAM COLLEGE

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze and explore in depth how a father's interpersonal communication helps restore his daughter's self-esteem after she fails to gain admission to her dream college. This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive methods. The study seeks to explain how the quality of communication within the family serves as a medium for restoring a daughter's self-esteem following after failing to gain admission to their college. In this study, the data collection procedure was designed in a planned manner to ensure that the information obtained was purely derived from the experiences of the subjects (children and fathers) and was free from the researcher's personal bias or assumptions. The data analysis in this study used a phenomenological approach to uncover the essence of the informants' experiences. The study's findings, daughters perceive their fathers' role in interpersonal communication as a form of emotional validation and a source of security that is crucial for rebuilding their self-confidence. This restoration of self-esteem is largely determined by the father's ability to initiate openness without the pressure of authority.

**Keywords:** *Father's interpersonal communication, Interpersonal Communication, Self-esteem.*

### INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of failure in college admissions in Indonesia has become an increasingly widespread social reality. The intense competition in the National Test-Based Selection (SNBT) has forced many applicants to accept the reality of not being accepted. This situation not only affects the academic aspect but also creates significant psychological pressure, particularly for adolescent girls who often view failure as a reflection of their self-worth (Mufatihah et al., 2025). Within the family environment, this pressure is inseparable from the role of parents, particularly the father figure. Fathers play a crucial role in the development of their daughters' self-esteem because they serve as a source of external validation of their self-worth. However, in social reality, the father's role is often limited to the practical function of being the economic provider, so that emotional contributions in family interactions become less effective. This situation results in the relationship between father and daughter not always being built through honest and supportive communication.

Observations of family life in Indonesia indicate that the relationship between fathers and their daughters is not always characterized by frequent and open communication. According to data from the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN, 2025), approximately 20.9% of children in Indonesia live in families where the father is absent or does not participate in their lives—whether actively, physically, or emotionally. Although there is a significant body of research on father absence, the condition where a father is physically present but emotionally absent is more commonly experienced by daughters. This phenomenon illustrates the gap between a father's physical presence and his emotional involvement in the household. When interpersonal communication breaks down, children often lack a safe space to express their emotional experiences, especially during difficult times such as academic setbacks. Phenomenological studies indicate that family relationships have a significant impact on the development of adolescent girls' self-esteem, particularly through the quality of interactions and communication within the family (Aghaei & Fatemi, 2024). Failure to gain admission to one's dream college is a common occurrence in Indonesia; the National Test-Based Selection (SNBT) and other college admission pathways are highly competitive. The phenomenon of failing to gain admission to one's dream university often involves deep emotional bonds between parents and children, where the moment of the admission announcement becomes a crucial turning point for the psychological well-being of young women. In this situation, the support of a father is highly anticipated as the

primary source of comfort. However, in reality, these expectations often clash with the extremely intense competition, leading the majority of applicants to face disappointment. A father's involvement in interpersonal communication has a significant impact on the development of a daughter's self-confidence. Research conducted by Nafisah, Prantono, and Diana (2025) shows that an active father's presence and high-quality communication serve as significant factors in a child's ability to cope with challenges and failures. These findings are consistent with the research by Sanjaya, Suminar, and Fardana (2024), which states that aspects of fatherly care such as warmth, responsiveness, and emotional support are important influences in the development of adolescent girls' self-esteem. A father's affection and emotional closeness help daughters feel safe and accepted, which is crucial for building confidence in their own abilities. Therefore, the quality of communication between fathers and their daughters not only strengthens their emotional bond but also serves as a foundation for the development of the child's self-confidence.

In the context of the father-daughter relationship, when a father creates a safe and supportive communication environment, his daughter can regain confidence in her own abilities after experiencing failing to gain admission to their dream college. Based on a review of previous research, this study aims to fill an academic gap by focusing primarily on an in-depth exploration of the role of interpersonal communication between fathers and daughters in restoring self-confidence following failing to gain admission to their dream college. However, research specifically examining how a father's interpersonal communication—particularly his presence (father presence)—plays a role in restoring a daughter's self-esteem after failing to gain admission to their dream college remains limited. The urgency of this study lies in the need to document how the figure of the father, who is culturally often perceived as rigid and authoritarian, can transform into an emotionally restorative communicator through a phenomenological approach. The gap that forms the basis of this study is the fact that previous research has tended to focus more on the impact of fatherlessness (or absence) on children's academic achievement and resilience. However, no in-depth research has analyzed how interpersonal communication with a present father contributes to restoring the self-esteem of girls who have failed to gain admission to their dream university. Therefore, this study will analyze and explore in depth how a father's interpersonal communication helps restore his daughter's self-esteem after she fails to gain admission to her dream college.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Interpersonal Communication**

Interpersonal communication is the process of exchanging messages that takes place directly between two or more people in a personal and transactional context, in which each party involved actively serves as both the sender and receiver of the message. DeVito (2022) states that interpersonal communication is characterized by reciprocal feedback, emotional involvement, and direct influence among the participants. Unlike mass communication or large-group communication, interpersonal communication takes place within a limited scope, thereby allowing for a deeper understanding of the messages conveyed. In this study, interpersonal communication is specifically defined as interpersonal communication within the family, particularly between fathers and their daughters. This focus is important because interpersonal communication within the family carries a higher emotional intensity than other forms of communication, thereby directly influencing an individual's psychological well-being. Joseph A. DeVito (2022) states that the quality of interpersonal communication is determined by five key principles: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positivity, and equality. These five principles serve as important indicators for creating effective and meaningful interpersonal communication, particularly in parent-child relationships.

#### **A. Openness**

Openness refers to an individual's willingness to share thoughts, feelings, and experiences honestly. In the father-daughter relationship, a father's openness in listening to his daughter's experiences of failure provides a safe space for her to express feelings of disappointment and low self-esteem. This openness serves as the first step in the healing process because the child feels that her experiences are acknowledged and valued.

#### **B. Empathy**

Empathy is the ability to understand and share another person's emotional state from their perspective. A father's empathy toward his child's emotional state following a failure provides a strong foundation for psychological support. Through empathy, a father can help his child view failure as part of the learning process, thereby supporting the restoration of self-esteem.

#### **C. Supportiveness (Supportive Attitude)**

A supportive attitude is demonstrated through verbal and nonverbal messages that make the listener feel safe and accepted. A father's support, whether through encouraging words or emotional attention, strengthens a

child's sense of security and boosts their self-confidence in facing failing to gain admission to their dream college.

**D. Positiveness (Positive Attitude)**

A positive attitude is reflected in the use of optimistic and appreciative language. A father's positive language, which emphasizes a child's effort rather than results alone, helps the child build a better self-perception. Positiveness encourages children to view failure as an opportunity for growth.

**E. Equality**

Equality means treating the person you are speaking with as an individual of equal worth in communication. In the parent-child relationship, equality makes the child feel that their opinions and feelings are valued. Equality fosters openness and a sense of self-worth, which are essential for rebuilding self-esteem.

### **Father Involvement and Adolescent Development**

Father involvement has become an increasingly important topic in family communication and developmental psychology research. Contemporary perspectives argue that fathers contribute not only through financial support but also through emotional engagement, guidance, and active participation in their children's lives. According to Lamb (2010), father involvement encompasses three dimensions: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. These dimensions influence children's cognitive, emotional, and social development.

Research consistently demonstrates that adolescents who experience higher levels of father involvement tend to report greater psychological well-being, stronger self-esteem, and higher academic achievement. Fathers play a unique role in promoting autonomy, resilience, and problem-solving skills, particularly during adolescence, a developmental period characterized by identity formation and emotional vulnerability. Positive father involvement provides adolescents with a secure relational foundation that helps them navigate stressful experiences and developmental challenges.

In the context of failing to gain admission to their dream college, father involvement becomes particularly significant. Adolescents who perceive their fathers as emotionally available and supportive are more likely to interpret failure as a temporary setback rather than as a reflection of personal inadequacy. Consequently, father involvement functions as a protective factor that mitigates the negative psychological consequences of failure and contributes to the maintenance of healthy self-esteem.

### **Emotional Support as a Protective Factor**

Emotional support refers to expressions of care, empathy, acceptance, encouragement, and reassurance provided by significant others. Within family relationships, emotional support represents one of the most influential forms of social support affecting adolescent psychological adjustment.

According to Cohen and Wills (1985), emotional support serves a buffering function by reducing the adverse effects of stressful events. When adolescents encounter challenges such as failing to gain admission to their dream college, emotional support from parents can lessen feelings of disappointment, anxiety, and self-doubt. Emotional support communicates acceptance and unconditional regard, helping adolescents maintain positive self-evaluations despite negative experiences.

Within father-daughter relationships, emotional support is often expressed through active listening, empathy, encouragement, and positive reinforcement. Such support fosters emotional security and strengthens adolescents' confidence in their ability to overcome difficulties. Previous studies indicate that emotional support from fathers is positively associated with self-esteem, emotional resilience, and psychological well-being among adolescent girls. Therefore, emotional support may serve as an important mechanism through which interpersonal communication influences self-esteem following experiences of failure.

### **Adolescent Coping After Failure**

Failure represents a common yet potentially stressful experience during adolescence. Academic setbacks, social rejection, and unmet expectations can negatively affect adolescents' self-esteem and emotional well-being. The manner in which adolescents cope with failure plays a critical role in determining whether such experiences lead to personal growth or psychological distress.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping theory distinguishes between problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping involves efforts to address the source of the problem, whereas emotion-focused coping aims to regulate emotional responses to stressful situations. Effective coping strategies enable adolescents to manage negative emotions, reinterpret setbacks constructively, and maintain psychological resilience.

Family communication significantly influences the development of coping mechanisms. Adolescents who receive supportive communication from parents are more likely to adopt adaptive coping strategies, such as seeking solutions, reframing negative experiences, and maintaining optimism. Conversely, unsupportive communication may increase avoidance behaviors, self-blame, and feelings of helplessness.

Within father-daughter relationships, effective interpersonal communication provides emotional resources that facilitate adaptive coping following failure. Fathers who demonstrate openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality help adolescents process negative experiences more constructively, thereby reducing the likelihood of diminished self-esteem.

The review of previous studies indicates that although father involvement, emotional support, and self-esteem have been widely investigated, limited research has examined how specific dimensions of interpersonal communication between fathers and daughters contribute to the restoration of adolescent self-esteem following experiences of failing to gain admission to their dream college. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by applying DeVito's interpersonal communication framework to understand the role of father-daughter communication in rebuilding self-esteem after failure.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study adopts DeVito's (2022) theory of interpersonal communication as the primary theoretical framework. The five dimensions of effective interpersonal communication—openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality—are conceptualized as communication factors that influence daughters' self-esteem after experiencing failing to gain admission to their dream college.

#### Father-Daughter Interpersonal Communication

- Openness
- Empathy
- Supportiveness
- Positiveness
- Equality

#### Emotional Support and Adaptive Coping Process

### **Self-esteem**

Self-esteem is an individual's evaluation of their own worth and value. According to Rosenberg, as cited in Yuliyani & Khoiryasdien (2023), self-esteem can be understood as the process by which an individual assesses themselves, whether through positive or negative perspectives. This evaluation is reflected in a person's attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives regarding themselves in various life situations. This concept of self-esteem encompasses two main aspects: an individual's perception of their personal competencies and their perception of their own worth as a person (Kamaruddin et al., 2022). Thus, self-esteem can be understood as a combination of self-confidence and self-respect, which play a crucial role in shaping an individual's patterns of self-evaluation (Monteiro et al., 2022). These evaluations are formed through an individual's experiences in interacting with their social environment, the achievements they have successfully attained, and the responses or feedback provided by significant others in their life, particularly within the family environment.

### **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive methods. The qualitative approach was chosen to examine social phenomena through a process of inductive reasoning, in which the researcher is directly involved in the subjects' lived context (Maulana & Budiyo, 2024). Through this approach, the study seeks to explain how the quality of communication within the family serves as a medium for restoring a daughter's self-esteem following failing to gain admission to their dream college. The researcher does not merely present data superficially but strives to explain the meaning behind the messages conveyed within the father-daughter relationship. In examining the phenomena studied, this study uses the interpersonal communication theory formulated by DeVito (2022). In this study, the data collection procedure was designed in a planned manner to ensure that the information obtained was purely derived from the experiences of the subjects (children and fathers) and was free from the researcher's personal bias or assumptions.

The selection of informants in this study was conducted using purposive sampling, a technique for selecting data sources based on specific criteria deemed capable of providing maximum information in accordance with the

research objectives. The informants in this study numbered 10 people: 8 daughters and 2 fathers. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the subjective experiences, perceptions, and feelings of informants in depth and comprehensively. In conducting these interviews, researchers used a protocol in the form of a semi-structured interview guide. This guide was systematically compiled based on indicators of interpersonal communication quality according to DeVito (2022), which include aspects of openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. The interview procedure was conducted in an informal and relaxed atmosphere to build trust (rapport) between the researcher and informant. In this context, the researcher acted as the primary instrument, actively listening to individuals' reflections on their life experiences (Maulana & Budiyo, 2024).

The data analysis in this study used a phenomenological approach to uncover the essence of the informants' experiences. The analysis process was conducted inductively through several systematic stages (Maulana & Budiyo, 2024):

1. Horizontalization

The researcher inventoried all important statements from the interviews regarding father-child communication experiences without any initial judgment. Each statement was given equal weight to uncover the purest essence of the experience.

2. Cluster of Meaning

The collected statements were then grouped into meaningful units or specific themes. These themes were structured based on indicators of interpersonal communication quality such as openness, empathy, and support.

3. Description of Essence

The researcher compiled an in-depth description of "what" the informants experienced and "how" they experienced it. This final stage aimed to uncover a single meaning from all informants' collective experiences regarding the role of father communication in restoring self-esteem.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Openness**

Openness is the foundational element that enables honest and sincere communication in interpersonal relationships. In the context of self-esteem recovery, openness is not merely measured by the amount of information shared, but by the extent to which individuals feel safe to open up about their feelings without fear of judgment. Based on field findings, the researchers discovered that the dynamics of openness between fathers and daughters failing to gain admission to their dream college are a complex process, involving a struggle between the fear of disappointing others and the need for emotional support. This communication barrier emerges in the early stages due to the child's internal perception that the failure will shatter their parents' high expectations. Informant acknowledged that the emotional closeness that had developed actually made her hesitate to be frank because of the burden of protecting her father's feelings. This is reflected in her following statement

Data 1

*"Awalnya kayak gak mau nyeritain, karena kayak aduh, tapi kan pastinya ditanya ya. Apalagi aku cukup dekat sama orangtuaku, jadi yaudah aku ceritain. Satu karena aku emang dekat sama mereka, dan kedua karena ditanya awalnya sih gamau ceritain. Karena sedih dan takut mengecewakan."*

### **Empathy**

Empathy in interpersonal communication is a communicator's ability to sense what others are feeling and to convey that understanding accurately. In the restoration of a young girl's self-esteem following failing to gain admission to their dream college, a father's empathy serves as a crucial emotional bridge. Research findings indicate that the empathy provided by a father figure manifests as emotional validation capable of creating a sense of safety (a safe place) for the informant who is at her lowest point.

Data 2

*"Oh, ya paling saya kalau secara fisik ya, saya usapkan kepalanya, gitu, kadang saya cium keningnya, gitu aja. Jadi biar dia, oh ada yang apa, kalau orang Sunda bilang pangri-grig, gitu. Jadi ada dia tuh merasa, oh ada yang melindungi, gitu."*

The importance of physical presence as a form of empathy is validated by the perspective of parents as supporting informants. The informants explained that physical gestures such as touching or kissing a child's forehead are not merely routine actions, but rather a form of communication intended to demonstrate a protective role. They mentioned a local term that holds deep significance for a father in safeguarding his child's mental well-being

### Supportiveness

A supportive attitude in interpersonal communication is a tangible manifestation of a communicator's presence—one capable of providing comfort and encouragement in stressful situations. In the aftermath of failing to gain admission to college, a father's role is not merely to offer reassurance but also to serve as a protective factor that helps prevent the child's mental health from deteriorating further. Based on the data collected, this support manifests in various complementary forms, ranging from mental reinforcement through words to guidance that helps the child see a silver lining amidst the disappointment.

Data 3

*"Dukungan dari beliau pastinya dengan beliau ngasih kata kata yang beneran nenangin aku, setiap aku ada apa apa beliau pasti nenangin gitu loh pake kalimat yang bikin tenang. Dengan cara beliau selalu nanyain keadaan aku juga bikin aku ngerasa didukung sepenuhnya."*

For many of the girls in this study, the most basic yet impactful form of support was sincere and consistent attention. They felt supported when their fathers actively positioned themselves as companions who constantly checked in on their emotional well-being without being asked. This consistent attention became a primary source of strength for them, as they felt that their father's reassuring presence was the form of support they needed most at that time.

### Positiveness

A positive attitude in interpersonal communication goes beyond simply using kind words; it also includes the ability to maintain an optimistic tone even in the midst of a disappointing situation. During the phase of rebuilding a young girl's self-esteem following an academic setback, this positive attitude plays a crucial role in helping her let go of the burden of guilt. A father figure can shift a child's focus from a bitter final outcome toward an appreciation for the struggle they have endured so far.

Data 4

*"Cara beliau memuji itu ya pasti lewat kata-kata dan pelukan pada awalnya, untuk menghargai usaha aku terlebih dahulu bahwa selama tiga tahun aku belajar beliau melihat juga, dan ketika hasil seleksi ditentukan dan aku nggak masuk ya itu beliau sudah anggap berhasil."*

This positive attitude also helps the child begin to distinguish between the experience of failure and their self-worth as a person. Through the recognition of their hard work over the three years of school, the child realizes that their dedication is still fully acknowledged by their father, even though the selection results were not in their favor. Infomant expressed how meaningful it was that their father genuinely appreciated their efforts in learning

### Equality

Equality in interpersonal communication emphasizes the importance of recognizing that each party in an interaction has equal standing and an equal right to be respected. In restoring a girl's self-esteem after failing to gain admission to their dream college, equality does not mean losing respect for her parents, but rather the absence of domination that oppresses the child mentally. Field findings indicate that when fathers eliminate authority distance and position themselves as discussion partners, children feel their dignity restored because they remain involved in making important decisions regarding their future.

Data 5

*"Jujur aku merasa diperlakukan secara setara dengan terus diberikan dukungan dan kehadirannya selalu ada buat aku, meskipun aku gagal aku tetap dikasih semangat tanpa direndahkan."*

This sense of respect arises when fathers consciously provide space for their children to express their opinions without fear of being belittled for their recent failure. The absence of judgmental attitudes makes children feel comfortable discussing openly. This experience is deeply felt by the children, who feel that their status as children does not deprive them of their right to be heard.

Based on research findings, the openness demonstrated by fathers is a key gateway for daughters to begin the process of rebuilding their shattered self-confidence. Analysis of the quality of openness in these interactions encompasses not only the amount of information exchanged, but also the extent to which the daughter feels a safe space to honestly communicate feelings of disappointment, sadness, and failure. Field findings demonstrate that girls' honesty about their emotional challenges does not emerge spontaneously, but rather is a direct response to the transparency and calm demonstrated by their fathers. When fathers respond to bad news without intimidating anger

or disappointment, This analysis strongly aligns with DeVito's (2022) principle of openness, which emphasizes that effective communication occurs when there is a willingness to share honestly about incoming stimuli without the presence of stressful psychological barriers. The father's calm response strongly signals that failing to gain admission to their dream college is not the primary parameter in measuring a child's self-worth within the family.

Empathy demonstrated by a father figure plays a fundamental role as an emotional bridge in the process of restoring a daughter's self-esteem. Empathy in interpersonal interactions extends beyond verbal responses, becoming a concrete action that can create a sense of security for a daughter who is experiencing a low point due to her failure to enter her dream college. Researchers have found that through empathy, father figures successfully validate their daughter's vulnerability, preventing feelings of failure from developing into lasting trauma. This empathy ultimately requires a father's willingness to take the time to genuinely listen to each of his or her child's stories of failure without any judgment. The emotional validation created through a father's willingness to listen allows the child to feel that their identity and efforts are recognized and appropriately valued.

The research results show that fathers' supportiveness comes in various complementary forms, ranging from emotional to cognitive to material. This support emerges in response to their children's self-esteem, which was shaken by their college selection failure. On the emotional level, fathers provide the most basic yet most meaningful form of support: genuine concern. This sense of support grows when fathers consistently pay attention to their children's emotional well-being after failure without being asked. For daughters, this attention is not just ordinary assistance, but rather an acknowledgement that their presence is still cared for even when their academic performance is declining.

The research results show that the positive attitude (positivity) displayed by fathers provides new energy for daughters to stop blaming themselves. This positive attitude in interpersonal communication is not just about giving empty praise, but rather the father's ability to maintain an optimistic atmosphere even when facing the disappointing situation of failing a college selection. Fathers strive to shift the focus of their children's attention from the bitter end to a form of appreciation for the struggles they have undertaken so far. Through this optimistic communication pattern, children feel that their failure is not seen as a shame, but rather as a natural part of life's dynamics.

Equality is the most transformative factor in the process of restoring a girl's self-esteem, as it operates at the most fundamental level of self-esteem: self-respect. According to DeVito (2022), equality in interpersonal communication means respecting the other person as an individual with equal value and standing in the exchange of information. In the relationship between a father and a daughter experiencing a difficult time after a failure, the application of equality means the father acts not as a judgmental authority figure, but as a discussion partner who fully respects the daughter's perspective. This respectful treatment of the child's position sends a strong signal that failing to gain admission to their dream college does not make them inferior or worthless in the eyes of the father figure.

## **CONCLUSION**

According to the study's findings, daughters perceive their fathers' role in interpersonal communication as a form of emotional validation and a source of security that is crucial for rebuilding their self-confidence. This restoration of self-esteem is largely determined by the father's ability to initiate openness without the pressure of authority. The research findings indicate that girls view their father's willingness to be a good listener as proof that their self-worth remains intact even if the selection results do not meet expectations. This process demonstrates that a child's mental recovery is rooted in the honesty and openness fostered by the father figure within the domestic environment.

Additionally, the effectiveness of this recovery also stems from how children interpret their father's empathetic attitude and tangible support as a form of unconditional acceptance. Fathers who can reframe failures and grant children autonomy to determine their future steps successfully foster a strong emotional bond. The child's interpretation of this cognitive and material support indicates that the father's emotional presence can dispel feelings of incompetence that may have arisen. The father's motivation in providing a space for the child to be heard without interruption ultimately helps the daughter view failure as a natural part of the learning process.

Overall, interpersonal communication in this relationship has been shown to effectively restore self-esteem when girls view their fathers as transparent and optimistic communication partners. Through the use of warm messages and appreciation for every effort the child makes, the feelings of low self-esteem that once dominated the child's thoughts are significantly reduced. This success in rebuilding self-esteem ultimately creates mental stability for the girl and fosters a resurgence of self-confidence rooted in appreciation, openness, and a genuine sense of belonging within the family.

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