



## The Role of Interpersonal Communication in First-born Female Generation Z as a Sandwich Generation in Medan Sunggal

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to explore the subjective experiences of first-born daughters of Generation Z who play the role of the sandwich generation in multigenerational family structures. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study delves into the deeper meanings of the dual roles played by the respondents through in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and documentation. The study involved five participants selected using purposive sampling, with criteria including being the first-born daughter aged between 21 and 26 years, residing in Medan Sunggal District, and actively involved in meeting the emotional and economic needs of their families. Data analysis was conducted thematically using the Miles and Huberman model, validated through triangulation, member checking, and academic discussion. The results of the study indicate that first-born daughters face structural, emotional, and cultural pressures that demand adaptive resilience. Open, empathetic, and equal interpersonal communication is the primary tool for negotiating expectations and maintaining psychological stability within the family. The three theories used interpersonal communication, role burden, and family system are able to explain the complexity of power relations and responsibilities within the family. These three concepts are interconnected in shaping the dynamics of the dual roles performed by the informants, where communication serves as the primary mechanism for managing role burdens within the demanding family system structure. These findings emphasize that dual roles are not merely practical but also emotional, making them crucial figures in maintaining family balance. This study recommends support from families, communities, and educational institutions in creating safe and dialogic spaces for first-born daughters so that their roles can be more psychosocially sustainable.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal Communication, Sandwich Generation, Firstborn Daughters of Generation Z



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## INTRODUCTION

The family is the primary foundation in shaping an individual's character and identity from childhood ([N. P. Putri, 2020](#)). In modern societies that continue to experience social and economic

changes, the role of the family has become increasingly complex and dynamic. As the primary social unit, the family has a significant responsibility in shaping moral, social, and cultural values that will guide individuals in their social lives. Understanding the dynamics of roles and relationships within contemporary families, including the burdens borne by certain members such as the firstborn daughter, is crucial for examining how individual identity develops amid the structural and emotional demands of the family. In the structure of Indonesian families, there are patterns of roles that are passed down from generation to generation and are patriarchal and cultural in nature. One significant role is the burden that is indirectly placed on the first daughter. The first daughter is often seen as the successor to the mother's domestic role, as well as the guardian of family harmony ([N. P. Putri, 2022](#)). This role not only encompasses household affairs but also the emotional role of maintaining balance in relationships among family members ([Ernitawati et al., 2023](#)). In many cases, especially in lower-middle-class families, the eldest daughter is even involved in supporting the family's economy. This position makes them central figures, but also vulnerable to high psychological pressure ([Amalianita & Putri, 2023](#)).

This phenomenon can be clearly observed in Medan Sunggal District, an urban area undergoing social and economic transformation. Although the community is becoming more open to modern values, family structures are still strongly influenced by traditional values. The eldest daughter in this area is often burdened with expectations to be a role model, the head of the household, and the balancer of family dynamics ([A. D. Purba & Ayuningtyas, 2024](#)). This poses a unique challenge for the younger generation, especially Generation Z women who are in the process of self-discovery ([A. S. Putri & Anzari, 2021](#)). This generation has grown up in the digital and globalization era, where demands for independence, academic achievement, and career development are very strong. However, on the other hand, they also have to face significant and complex family responsibilities. This double burden places them in a position that is highly vulnerable to emotional exhaustion and identity crises. Balancing family demands and personal aspirations is a central issue in their lives ([Nurfaiza et al., 2024](#)).

The first daughters of Generation Z can be categorized as part of the sandwich generation, which is a generation that must take care of both the older and younger generations simultaneously. This concept was first introduced by Dorothy A. Miller and is now increasingly relevant in understanding the dynamics of modern families ([Irawaty & Gayatri, 2023](#)). The dual roles undertaken by the eldest daughter not only demand physical and mental resilience but also strong communication skills. When family expectations conflict with individual desires, internal conflicts often arise ([Pamukti & Sa'diyah, 2024](#)). If not handled properly, this can impact mental health and interpersonal relationships within the family. In some cases, the eldest daughter even sacrifices her personal interests to maintain family stability. Such circumstances can disrupt personal development and lead to deep feelings of frustration ([Salsabila & Annisah, 2024](#)).

Interpersonal communication is a crucial aspect in maintaining family harmony and functionality. Through open, empathetic, and supportive communication, family members can understand one another and reduce the risk of prolonged conflicts ([N. P. Putri, 2020](#)). In the context of the first daughter, interpersonal communication is not only a means of conveying messages but also a mechanism for negotiating roles. They must be able to express boundaries, aspirations, and

personal needs without causing friction with other family members. When communication occurs in a healthy manner, the likelihood of role conflicts can be minimized. However, in many Indonesian families that still uphold hierarchy and parental authority, children often do not have enough space to express their feelings. This hierarchy is often the main obstacle to healthy two-way communication ([Khairunnisa & Hartini, 2022](#)). As a result, many firstborn daughters choose to suppress their feelings, which ultimately affects their mental well-being.

The importance of interpersonal communication in modern family dynamics is also evident in the mediating role often assumed by the eldest daughter ([Amalianita & Putri, 2023](#)). They not only serve as a link between parents and younger siblings but also act as a balancer during conflicts among family members ([N. P. Putri, 2022](#)). In such situations, effective communication strategies are needed, such as active listening, expressing empathy, and being open to others' opinions. When the eldest daughter lacks adequate communication skills, family conflicts can become more complicated. Research by [Ernitawati \(2023\)](#) shows that the success of interpersonal communication in sandwich families is greatly influenced by empathetic attitudes and openness. This indicates that the dual role pressure they experience can only be addressed through a reflective communicative approach. Therefore, equipping the eldest daughter with communication skills from an early age is crucial. Without this, the mediating and balancing roles they undertake will become a source of prolonged stress.

Research by [Purba & Ayuningtyas \(2024\)](#) highlights the importance of open and assertive communication in reducing psychosocial pressure in sandwich families. In the context of firstborn daughters, this communication allows them to express their aspirations and challenges without causing conflict. Assertive communication differs from aggressive communication; it allows opinions to be expressed firmly while still respecting others. Firstborn daughters who can communicate assertively have a greater chance of maintaining a balance between personal needs and family demands. In hierarchical family situations like in Medan Sunggal, this ability is particularly important. Often, generational value differences create a widening communication gap. Therefore, communication training based on social and emotional skills is an urgent need. In this way, the pressure from dual roles does not always have to lead to conflict or self-sacrifice.

[Nurfaiza \(2024\)](#) in the field of literature shows that communication strategies such as temporarily withdrawing are also used as a form of psychological protection by individuals of the sandwich generation. This strategy is also frequently applied by firstborn daughters as a response to the emotional burdens they experience. Withdrawing does not mean avoiding conflict, but rather a way to recharge mental energy before reengaging. Such an approach needs to be understood by other family members to avoid misunderstandings. In families with closed communication, this strategy is often misinterpreted as defiance or disobedience. However, for the eldest daughter, this is an important coping mechanism. It is important to build a culture of communication that is mutually understanding and supportive. Such a culture allows individuals within the family, including the eldest daughter, to fulfill their roles in a healthier psychological manner.

From a psychological perspective, [Salsabila & Annisah \(2024\)](#) emphasize the need for counseling services for individuals in the sandwich generation to effectively manage stress. The eldest

daughter requires strong social support to fulfill her role without losing her personal life direction. In addition to counseling, stress management skills training is also needed to prevent them from falling into chronic mental exhaustion. Many of them are unaware that they are experiencing burnout due to the continuous burdens they carry. Therefore, the role of the community, educational institutions, and even the media is crucial in raising collective awareness about the pressures faced by young women. [Irawaty & Gayatri \(2023\)](#) even highlight that women's resilience in facing dual pressures is a key indicator of the sustainability of family functions. This resilience must be cultivated within the family through healthy communication and the strengthening of equal roles. Without this, the role of the eldest daughter will become a burden that limits individual potential.

Open, equal, and empathetic communication patterns must be the foundation of modern families so that children, including firstborn daughters, can develop optimally. This is in line with the study by [Khairunnisa & Hartini \(2022\)](#) which emphasizes the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in helping individuals cope with relational pressures within the family. This approach includes social support, training in interpersonal communication skills, and psychosocial stress management. The implementation of this approach has proven effective in strengthening the resilience of women's roles in sandwich families ([Fauziah, 2025](#)). In the context of Medan Sunggal, this is important given that the area is caught between clashing traditional values and modernity. Families there require adaptive communication strategies to avoid generational gaps. The firstborn daughters equipped with these skills will be better prepared to navigate complex roles within the family. Conversely, without the right strategies, they may become trapped in unproductive cycles of stress.

Considering these dynamics, this study aims to explore in depth how first-born girls of Generation Z in Medan Sunggal build interpersonal communication patterns within their families. The main focus is on the communication strategies they use in facing the demands of their dual roles as mediators, caregivers, and seekers of self-identity. This research is important for understanding how interpersonal communication plays a role in shaping the psychosocial resilience of first-born girls amid emotional and structural pressures within modern families. This study will also examine how local cultural values and social transformations influence their communication styles. In this context, it is important to understand not only the communication patterns themselves but also the sociocultural background that shapes them. Through this understanding, it is hoped that effective ways can be found to support firstborn girls in fulfilling their roles without compromising their psychosocial well-being. This research is also expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the development of social intervention policies and family education. Thus, the findings of this study are not only academically relevant but also have broad social implications. First-born daughters require special attention in the discourse on healthy and sustainable family development.

The phenomenon of firstborn daughters of Generation Z living in sandwich families reflects structural and cultural challenges that must be addressed immediately. Pressure from traditional demands, gender expectations, and personal needs makes their position very complex. In this situation, interpersonal communication is the key to building healthy and functional relationships

within the family. This research aims to open a dialogue on the importance of building an equal and supportive family, taking into account the voices and experiences of firstborn daughters. This study is expected to broaden perspectives on family dynamics in the modern era and strengthen the movement for gender equality within the domestic sphere. By paying attention to aspects of communication and emotional pressure, Indonesian families can move toward more inclusive and adaptive patterns of interaction. Firstborn daughters should not be seen merely as a burden or a pillar of support, but also as individuals with the right to a balanced life. Therefore, it is important to create a space that allows them to develop without having to bear excessive pressure from unequal family structures.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, aiming to explore the subjective experiences of first-born girls of Generation Z who live as the sandwich generation in a multigenerational family structure (Sugiyono, 2023). This approach was chosen because it allows for a deep, contextual, and interpretive understanding of the relational, emotional, and interpersonal communication patterns experienced by individuals within the family environment. Qualitative descriptive design is considered most appropriate for capturing the complexity of social and personal meanings that cannot be revealed through quantitative data, especially in the context of dual role pressures and identity search within a layered family system (Creswell, 2016). This study focuses on how informants construct reflective communication and adaptation strategies that are rich in cultural values that are alive within the family.

The research design used is qualitative descriptive, as it allows researchers to capture and interpret phenomena based on the direct experiences of informants. The main emphasis is on a comprehensive understanding of interpersonal communication practices and the psychosocial pressures felt by first daughters as part of a complex multigenerational family structure.

There were five subjects in this study, selected using purposive sampling with specific criteria: (1) first-born female children, (2) aged between 21 and 26 years, (3) residing in Medan Sunggal District, and (4) actively involved in fulfilling the emotional and economic needs of the family. These criteria were established to ensure the informants' suitability for the research objectives, namely to explore specifically the experiences of first-born daughters in carrying out their dual roles amid family demands.

**Table 1. Respondent Data**

No.	Respondent Code	Age	Profession
1.	KR	21 year	<i>Content Creator</i>
2.	SF	26 year	<i>Quality Control</i>
3.	MA	25 year	<i>Supervisor Digital Marketing</i>
4.	FS	22 year	<i>Social Media Admin</i>
5.	JA	22 year	<i>Store Crew</i>

Source: Researchers, 2025



The main data collection technique used was semi-structured in-depth interviews, which allowed informants to openly and reflectively narrate their personal experiences. In addition, the researchers also conducted non-participatory observations to capture the dynamics of communication in a natural context, and collected supporting documentation such as diaries or recordings of family activities as part of source triangulation.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, following the stages of Miles and Huberman's (2014) model, namely: (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, and (3) conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction was carried out by sorting important information from interviews and observations, which were then grouped into main themes. Data presentation is organized in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate interpretation of communication patterns, role pressures, and coping strategies. The focus of the analysis is directed at finding meaning that emerges from the interpersonal communication practices of the first daughter as a mediator between generations in the family.

To maintain data validity, this study applies four main validation techniques. First, source triangulation is conducted by comparing information obtained from various sources to ensure consistency and suitability of data. Second, technique triangulation is applied by combining the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to strengthen the objectivity of findings and reduce potential bias. Third, member-checking was conducted by confirming the initial interpretation results with the informants, thereby ensuring the accuracy and relevance of the understanding of their experiences. Finally, academic discussions with the supervisor were conducted periodically as a form of methodological supervision and quality control, ensuring that the analysis process and conclusion drawing were carried out in accordance with scientific standards. With the implementation of these validation procedures, the research aims to present an authentic and academically accountable picture of the dynamics of the role of the first daughter in sandwich families, while also contributing significantly to the study of interpersonal communication and family structure transformation in modern society.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Indonesian family dynamics are still heavily influenced by traditional and hierarchical values, with the first daughter tending to be placed as the central figure who bears the heavy responsibility of maintaining the emotional and operational balance of the household. This is evident from the narratives of the informants, who revealed that they often act as substitutes for their mothers in terms of childcare and household decision-making, especially when their parents are limited by age or health ([Ariyanto, 2022](#)). The demands of this role become even more complex when the eldest daughter is part of Generation Z, who grew up in an era of digitalization, shifting individualistic values, and increased awareness of the importance of mental health. They find themselves in a dilemma between fulfilling conservative family expectations and realizing their own progressive aspirations. As explained by Goode's role burden theory in [Amanda \(2024\)](#), conflict arises when individuals must juggle multiple roles simultaneously with limited resources, including time, energy, and emotional stability. All informants experienced significant psychosocial burdens,

including stress, guilt, and emotional exhaustion, as they had to care for aging parents while also serving as role models and caregivers for their younger siblings ([A. D. A. Purba & Susanti, 2024](#)). The role of the sandwich generation is not merely a practical task but also involves intense emotional dimensions that are often unrecognized by the surrounding environment. This highlights the need for stronger social support from family and society for the eldest daughter within a multigenerational family structure.

[Joseph A. DeVito \(2018\)](#), states that the effectiveness of communication within a family is greatly influenced by five main dimensions: openness, empathy, supportive attitude, positive feelings, and equality. Based on findings from five informants, it appears that the dimensions of openness and empathy remain a challenge, particularly due to generational gaps and value differences between them and their parents. Hierarchical communication often makes it difficult for them to express feelings of fatigue or personal needs without feeling guilty or being perceived as unfilial. However, some informants successfully created a space for dialogue with their younger siblings through a more equal and supportive approach, reflecting the strengthening of their role as mediators within the family. In this context, Murray Bowen's family systems approach ([Pamukti & Sa'diyah \(2024\)](#)) is relevant, as it demonstrates that changes in the behavior of one family member can impact the entire system. The eldest daughter, as the central point in the dynamics of the sandwich family, has the potential to become an agent of change in family communication patterns, particularly in building more open and supportive relationships. They not only serve as the bearers of the burden but also as the guardians of emotional balance within the complex and dynamic family system. A deeper understanding of their interpersonal communication strategies is crucial for formulating effective intervention approaches, both from psychological and social perspectives ([Santika & Aziz, 2022](#)).

### **The Role and Responsibilities of the First Daughter in Multigenerational Families and Their Strategies for Managing Economic, Psychosocial, and Intergenerational Pressures**

The first daughter in the family structure, especially in a socio-cultural context that upholds family values such as in the Medan Sunggal District, often faces complex and multidimensional role burdens. Based on interview results, informants stated that their responsibilities extend beyond domestic management to include emotional, moral, and social support for other family members. They actively serve as family mediators, guiding younger siblings, and assisting parents in various roles. Informant KR provided an emotional perspective on this role, stating, *"As the eldest child, I feel I have a duty to be stronger, more alert, and able to empathize with those around me. Currently, my top priority is to complete my education on time while preparing for a career to support my parents and younger siblings in the future."* This situation reflects the psychosocial pressure arising from the dual role that must be fulfilled in structurally unsupportive circumstances. After KR described education and career as the main aspects, SF added the dimensions of emotional and financial management, stating, *"I meet my parents' needs and ensure the availability of basic necessities. Although I can still save money, those funds are often redirected for urgent needs."* This reflects that the eldest daughter not only serves as the economic pillar but also as the primary manager in maintaining family economic stability.

Informant MA emphasized that she not only provides financial support but also plays a role in guiding her younger sibling in moral and educational matters, *"I help cover expenses like vehicle installments and my sibling's tuition fees. Even though it's not explicitly requested, I feel morally responsible for the family's well-being."* Financial contributions often stem from personal moral motivation rather than explicit family demands. This pattern is also evident in SF's experience, where she actively manages the family budget by adjusting expenditures objectively and proportionally to urgent needs. She stated, *"I meet my parents' needs and ensure the availability of basic necessities. Even though I can still save, the funds are often redirected for urgent needs."* This reflects how the eldest daughter not only serves as an economic pillar but also as the primary manager of the family's economic stability.

A similar perspective was shared by FS, who explained, *"My salary isn't large, but I always set aside money to pay for electricity, my younger sibling's education needs, and household expenses. I feel this is a form of responsibility, even though it is not required."* Despite not having a large income, she still feels obligated to set aside her earnings to support the family's basic needs. However, informant KR provided an emotional perspective on this role, stating, *"I have to handle everything on my own while still being expected to guide my siblings and meet my parents' needs. This is not easy, but I do my best."* This situation reflects the psychosocial pressure arising from the dual roles that must be fulfilled in structurally unsupportive conditions. JA's explanation may illustrate that by emphasizing the ability to manage priorities, *"I regularly send part of my salary home, even though personal needs are urgent. I learned to manage priorities so as not to neglect my obligations to the family."* This indicates that fulfilling family responsibilities is consistently carried out with mature priority management in fulfilling the dual role as a breadwinner and a caring family member. Findings from [Harjanto \(2024\)](#) show that the eldest daughter performs complex and layered family functions. They serve as pillars in various aspects of the family, as guardians of values, conflict mediators, protectors, and even as representatives of family success in the eyes of society. These roles make them the focal point in family dynamics, both practically and emotionally.

Most informants said they had a role in helping to support their family's economic needs, even though this role wasn't absolute or mandatory. Informant MA emphasized his contribution to supporting his family financially as a form of moral responsibility, *"I help cover things like installments and my sibling's college tuition. Although not explicitly requested, I feel morally responsible for the family's well-being."* This statement indicates that a sense of ownership over the family's condition is the primary motivation for providing financial support. SF's experience reinforces this narrative by highlighting the active role of the daughter as the family's financial manager, stating that *"I meet my parents' needs and ensure the availability of basic necessities. Although I can still save money, the funds are often redirected for urgent needs."* The eldest daughter is not only an economic pillar but also the primary manager of the family's economic stability, demonstrating how she allocates funds wisely while considering urgent needs. FS also provides an example of consistent personal sacrifice, despite limited financial conditions.

KR's perspective further expands the understanding of the psychosocial dimensions of this role, stating, *"I have to handle everything on my own while still being expected to guide my younger siblings and meet my parents' needs. This is not easy, but I do my best."* This situation reflects the psychosocial pressure arising from the dual role that must be fulfilled in structurally unsupportive conditions. JA's



statement emphasizes the importance of managing priorities as an adaptive strategy. He reveals that even though he was not explicitly asked to do so, he felt obligated to help his family financially. She said, *"I regularly send part of my salary home, even though my personal needs are urgent. I learned to manage my priorities so as not to neglect my obligations to my family."* JA exemplifies how self-awareness and financial management go hand in hand in fulfilling intergenerational responsibilities.

Time management between the older generation (parents) and the younger generation (siblings) is a significant challenge for informants. This is experienced by those who are working or have busy academic schedules. In fulfilling their roles as the sandwich generation, the informants demonstrated different strategies in managing time and building intergenerational relationships. Informant MA began the narrative by explaining that work flexibility through a hybrid system has been a solution in maintaining emotional closeness with his family. He stated, *"Because my work system is hybrid, when working from home, I have more freedom to maintain communication with my parents and younger siblings. They also understand if I'm in a meeting or have work responsibilities."* MA shows that physical presence may be limited, but emotional closeness can still be maintained through time management and open communication. FS adds a perspective on using vacation time to rebuild emotional closeness. He says, *"I use vacation time to spend time with my family."*

JA reinforces this picture by explaining the prioritization strategy he applies in dividing his time for family. He states, *"I optimize my time each week to take care of household needs and give attention to my parents. I also build open communication with my younger sibling to create a harmonious relationship."* This statement shows that time management is not only technical but also part of the effort to maintain harmonious intergenerational relationships through equal and open communication. Unlike before, KR revealed the dynamics of changes in interaction time since he started working. He said, *"Before working, I could more easily divide my time. However, after starting work, time with family became limited. Usually, I only had time for a brief conversation with my mother after work because I was already tired."* This reflects that the transition to the workforce has consequences for the quality of family interactions, requiring new adjustments to maintain the relationship. According to SF, sacrificing personal time is necessary to fulfill family responsibilities. She said, *"I set priorities in managing time and energy, though in the end I often neglect my own needs for my parents."* This statement reflects an awareness of the importance of emotional involvement despite having to sacrifice personal time, and illustrates a high level of dedication to family roles. Findings from five informants show that first-generation sandwich children demonstrate high adaptive capacity in facing time and intergenerational communication challenges. They utilize work flexibility, free time, and open communication as primary strategies to maintain harmonious family relationships. These findings align with Mumek's (2013), theory of interpersonal communication, which emphasizes the importance of openness, continuity, and appropriate communication media for building and maintaining healthy relationships in a multigenerational

### **Family Communication Practices and Aspirations Related to Parental Expectations and Hopes**

Communication regarding parents' expectations and hopes for their first daughter is an important aspect of family dynamics that often involves emotional tension and psychosocial burdens

(Lufipah et al., 2022). In this situation, communication practices become a key instrument for bridging the gap between parents' expectations and the reality faced by their children. KR explains that she always strives to give her best to her parents, even though she cannot fulfill all their expectations. She says, *"I always tell my parents that I will continue to give my best for them. Although they often end up disappointed by the expectations I cannot fulfill, I still ask them to give me their full trust."* This statement shows a desire to maintain a harmonious relationship while prioritizing open communication, even amid the pressure of expectations

A similar effort is made by JA, who recognizes the importance of communicating his limitations to his parents. He explains that openness is the key to responding to family expectations. *"I honestly communicate my capabilities, both in terms of time and finances, without feeling guilty. I am aware of my limitations, and I am grateful that my parents are open and understanding, even though their expectations sometimes make me feel quietly pressured."* This shows that honesty communicated in a polite and empathetic manner can create a shared understanding within the family. MA also emphasized the importance of open discussion before making decisions in the family. *"My parents and I always discuss things before making any decisions. We set out our respective responsibilities so that we don't burden each other. I am also open about my personal plans, such as further studies, and they give me their support as long as it doesn't interfere with the family's main needs."* This communication model shows that mutual understanding is the main foundation of the parent-child relationship.

Unlike previous experiences, FS shared that her parents' expectations were high regarding academic achievements and a career aligned with her field of study. She said, *"My mother hoped I would secure a job commensurate with my bachelor's degree. When I decided to work as a restaurant server, she expressed her disappointment. However, I explained that I was still waiting for my diploma and gaining experience while continuing to strive to meet her expectations in the long term."* This statement reflects the child's effort to respect parental expectations while rationally explaining the realities of the situation. SF concluded the discussion by emphasizing the importance of transparency and clarity in family communication, stating, *"I openly explained my position, including financial conditions that sometimes fall short. If there are expectations that don't align, I clarify the points that need to be understood, and I involve my parents and siblings in making important decisions."* This practice demonstrates that honest and rational communication is a strategic way to build trust and understanding within a dynamic family structure.

This phenomenon highlights the importance of interpersonal communication skills in bridging the gap between parents' and children's expectations, as open and honest communication is essential to prevent conflicts in family relationships. Awareness of the importance of conveying conditions factually not only helps create a healthy dialogue space but also serves as the foundation for avoiding unrealistic expectations. Reflective and thoughtful communication practices are important tools for firstborn daughters to build trust and maintain emotional balance amid the structural burdens they bear (Purnia et al., 2020). If communication is built on an equal and responsive basis, expectations can be managed in a more realistic and humane manner.

The eldest daughter not only carries out practical responsibilities in the family, but also harbors great hopes for transformation in family communication patterns. One-way, rigid communication

that is laden with expectations tends to leave little room for children to voice their opinions, express their limitations, or ask for understanding ([Yoanita, 2022](#)). As a result, many of them feel emotionally exhausted and struggle to express their personal needs without feeling guilty. They place great hope in the creation of more empathetic, open, and psychologically pressure-free relationships, free from high expectations or unfair comparisons. KR expressed her hope that all her efforts would be appreciated by her parents without being overshadowed by comparisons with others. She said, *"I hope my parents will appreciate even the smallest efforts I make to meet their needs and set an example for my younger siblings. Instead of comparing me to other people's children or constantly feeling inadequate about what I have done my best to achieve."* This statement highlights the fundamental need for emotional recognition and appreciation for consistent efforts.

A similar hope was expressed by SF, who recognized that expectations that are not communicated well can lead to misunderstandings and strain family relationships: *"In my opinion, it is better to communicate openly, especially with parents, because a lack of openness can lead to misunderstandings in family relationships. Often, problems arise simply because information is not conveyed clearly."* SF's aspirations show that ideal communication is not just about conveying expectations, but also includes clarity and emotional honesty in conveying the real situation. MA expressed a more reflective and critical perspective, emphasizing that parents should not view children as tools for fulfilling family expectations. She explained, *"I hope parents understand that children are not investments or the only way out for the family. I want parents to be able to position themselves as a safe space for children not dumping all their responsibilities, but being present as positive support for children's dreams and activities."* This hope reflects a desire for more equal and dialogical family relationships, grounded in empathy and respect for children's autonomy.

FS added that in uncertain social and economic conditions, she stated, *"I think parents need to be made aware that the current situation is not the same as before. So, for example, if you've already found a job, just go with it first; don't immediately compare or expect too much. We as children also need time, and it's important for parents to understand that process."* Meanwhile, JA emphasized the importance of recognizing the non-material contributions she makes to the family, which are often overlooked. She said, *"I hope my role is valued not only because I can help materially, but also because I try to be emotionally present. I want the family to understand that I also need space for myself to rest and plan for my future."* JA's aspirations expand the understanding that ideal communication also involves recognition of emotional aspects, not merely economic contributions. Through the five informants, there is a consistent alignment of aspirations toward a family communication pattern that is open, supportive, and balanced between parental expectations and the realities faced by children. These aspirations reflect the importance of emotional support and interpersonal appreciation, as explained by [DeVito \(2018\)](#). Thus, the expectation of an ideal communication pattern is not merely normative but stems from empirical experiences that reflect the emotional and psychosocial needs of the first daughter in the structure of the sandwich generation family.

The first generation of women from Generation Z to assume the role of the sandwich generation across various regions, including within the socio-cultural context of Indonesia, face significant social and psychological pressures. They are not only responsible for meeting the family's economic needs but also serve as emotional stabilizers within the household. The demands to act

as role models, conflict mediators, and bearers of their parents' hopes place them in a highly central position. In this context, interpersonal communication is a key element in balancing these roles without compromising personal well-being. Within the framework of interpersonal communication theory proposed by [Joseph A. DeVito \(2018\)](#), the quality of communication within families is greatly influenced by five main elements: openness, empathy, support, positive attitude, and equality. Open and empathetic communication strategies are necessary to maintain harmony with family members.

This aligns with the findings of [Brown & Errington \(2024\)](#), which indicate that Generation Z's interpersonal communication is significantly influenced by social perceptions and environmental expectations toward them. Furthermore, the social and cultural burdens associated with being the first daughter are clarified through William J. Goode's role strain theory. The conflict in [Khalil & Santoso \(2022\)](#) between personal interests and family responsibilities carried out simultaneously creates layered emotional pressure. The social structure that still places women in a subordinate position adds challenges in establishing reasonable role boundaries. This tension is often not explicitly visible but impacts an individual's psychological resilience in the long term.

According to Goode in [Priyandoko & Rahmasari \(2023\)](#) unbalanced role strain can lead to stress, emotional conflict, and disruptions in social functioning. When viewed through Bowen's family systems theory, the role of the firstborn daughter cannot be separated from the emotional and relational structure that binds all family members. The firstborn often serves as a bridge between the older and younger generations, as well as a balancing figure in addressing family conflicts. In such a system, emotional pressure does not only stem from explicit tasks but also from implicit expectations that persist and are systematically passed down. This is emphasized by Brown in [Burke \(2017\)](#), who explains that family dynamics are mutually influential, and imbalance in one individual can affect the overall balance of the system. Technological development and the influence of digitalization also affect the communication patterns of the firstborn daughter of Generation Z. Social media influences the formation of their self-concept and communication style. Face-to-face interactions tend to decrease, while digital communication dominates. This requires adaptation in maintaining emotional closeness, both through time management and more flexible communication approaches, to ensure family relationships remain intact in the dynamic daily routine. Time management strategies and parental expectations are key dimensions in balancing these dual roles. Clear time allocation and communication about capacity limits are key to maintaining family harmony. Imbalances in fulfilling unrealistic expectations can lead to emotional exhaustion. Therefore, supportive communication within the family is essential to emphasize that honest reflective communication is the first step in preventing psychosocial stress among adult women in the sandwich generation family. This aligns with DeVito's argument regarding the importance of equality in interpersonal communication as the foundation for healthy and mutually respectful relationships. [Yoanita \(2022\)](#) emphasizes that ideal family communication should prioritize equal relationships, not dominant ones.

Efforts to build healthy communication must be accompanied by more progressive and adaptive value reforms within families. Character education and social support play an important role in shaping the emotional resilience and interpersonal communication skills of the younger generation.

Support from peers and the community can help Gen Z develop reflective and inclusive communication patterns, especially when they face complex role pressures. Pamukti & Sa'diyah (2024) state that positive social networks have a significant contribution in shaping healthy intergenerational communication skills. Thus, interpersonal communication within the family is not merely a technical tool but also an emotional foundation that determines the quality of relationships among family members. The three theories used by DeVito, Goode, and Bowen provide an integrated explanation of how the dynamics of pressure, communication patterns, and emotional relationships function within the family system of the sandwich generation. This research underscores the importance of shifting the communication paradigm within families to enable the younger generation, particularly firstborn daughters, to grow independently, healthily, and with dignity amid the complexities of their roles.

## CONCLUSION

The first female members of Generation Z to take on the role of the sandwich generation face a double burden that is structural, emotional, and cultural. They play a role not only as economic providers but also as guardians of relational balance within the family, making them central figures in intergenerational dynamics. The demands they face come from their parents' expectations, their responsibilities towards their younger siblings, and the need to remain independent and productive in their personal lives. In this situation, interpersonal communication skills are key to maintaining psychological stability and family harmony. A communication approach that emphasizes openness, empathy, support, and equality has proven effective in helping informants cope with daily psychosocial pressures. For example, one informant openly discussed with their parents about their limits in helping with the family's economic needs, leading to a realistic agreement that reduced emotional burdens. However, they still fulfill their role as the eldest child amidst the family's resource constraints, such as time, energy, and finances, which adds complexity to their responsibilities. Social pressure and high traditional expectations also pose challenges that affect communication and role balance within the family. Their success in fulfilling these roles demonstrates strong adaptive capacity and the ability to manage emotions in a mature and reflective manner. Support from family and community is crucial in alleviating the burden and strengthening the psychosocial resilience of eldest daughters in facing these challenges.

Healthy interpersonal communication is not only related to technical aspects, but also an emotional and strategic process in maintaining balance between generations within the family. The three theories used, namely interpersonal communication, role burden, and family system, complement each other in explaining how the dynamics of power, responsibility, and social structure shape the life experiences of first-born daughters. In this position, they are required to perform practical functions while also serving as emotional connectors amid the various interests of family members. The pressures they experience reflect the importance of collective awareness of social support, safe spaces within the family, and patterns of communication that are equal and open. Therefore, families and their surrounding environments need to develop supportive relationships so that burdens that have been hidden can be managed more healthily. This study recommends further



extensive and in-depth research, as well as the development of gender- and family-based policies that can provide protection and empowerment for firstborn daughters as central figures in maintaining the stability of modern families.

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