

Fathers Who Stay Involved: The Key to Psychological Well-Being in Emerging Adulthood?

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Abstract. This study aims to empirically examine the relationship between father's involvement in parenting and the psychological well-being of emerging adults. This study involved 263 respondents who were in the emerging adulthood phase. The data were collected using a purposive sampling technique through a Google Form questionnaire. The measuring instrument for psychological well-being was the Indonesian version of the Psychological Well-Being Scale, which consists of 29 items based on Ryff's theory. Father involvement was measured using the Perceived Father Involvement (PFII) scale, consisting of 36 items based on the theory of Saliha and Jayan. Data were analyzed using the JAMOWI application with Spearman's rho correlation technique. The results of the analysis indicate a positive and significant relationship between father involvement and psychological well-being in emerging adults. Furthermore, father involvement in parenting explains 18% of the variance in psychological well-being.

Keywords: Emerging adulthood, Father involvement, Psychological Well-Being

1 Introduction

Emerging adulthood is a transitional period between late adolescence and early adulthood, focusing on individuals aged 18–25 [1]. During this transition, individuals can no longer be considered adolescents, yet they are also not fully recognized as adults. Ambiguity, identity exploration self-focus, emotional turmoil, and instability are five distinctive characteristics that differentiate emerging adulthood from other developmental stages [2].

These unique characteristics make emerging adulthood a crucial developmental stage because individuals are developing the capacities, skills, and character qualities needed to complete the transition into adulthood [3]. The developmental process to reach adulthood can be formed through the accomplishment of developmental tasks, which include living independently from parents, advancing career or academic goals, building meaningful relationships, making autonomous decisions, and attaining emotional maturity [3]. If an individual fails to accomplish at least one of these developmental tasks, they become more vulnerable to anxiety, social alienation, loneliness, and even a quarter-life crisis [4].

Individual differences in how people address life's problems are related to their level of psychological well-being [4]. Psychological well-being is a psychological concept that reflects

how well an individual functions, marked by self-acceptance, a sense of life purpose, autonomy in decision-making, positive relationships with others, effective life management, and ongoing personal development [5] [6].

In reality, emerging adults still tend to experience low psychological well-being. This is evidenced by research conducted by Kurniasari, Rusmana, and Budiman [7], showing that 64.44% of emerging adults feel anxious when expressing opinions, 53% experience shame, fear, and confusion, 51% are afraid of not meeting parental expectations, 42.2% often daydream or hallucinate, 44.44% feel inferior, and 33.33% are not open to others. Another study by Trihastuti and Anindya on 50 guidance and counseling students at Unika Atma Jaya revealed that 54% of students were categorized as having low psychological well-being, 26% moderate, 18% very low, 2% well-being, and none reported high psychological well-being [8].

This reality reflects that many emerging adults still experience anxiety about the future, confusion about life purpose, poor interpersonal relationships, and low self-acceptance, marked by feelings of inferiority, shame, and self-doubt. This aligns with Ryff's [5] statement that a person's level of psychological well-being can be observed through indicators such as self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy in life decisions, a clear life purpose, openness to criticism, and the ability to grow continuously.

A person's psychological well-being is influenced by various complex factors such as life meaning, spirituality, personality, parental involvement, and demographic factors like age, gender, and cultural differences [5] [9]. According to Davis, parental involvement refers to a set of mental activities accompanied by contribution and responsibility [10]. Epstein outlines six types of parental involvement, including activities to improve parental understanding of their children, active communication, volunteering to support the child, helping with home learning, decision-making, and collaboration with the community [11].

A closer look reveals that parental involvement includes both mother and father involvement. However, parenting responsibilities have historically been more heavily placed on mothers [12]. In Indonesia, the belief that fathers are only responsible for earning income while mothers handle all domestic affairs still persists [13]. Yet, research by Palkovitz shows that father involvement actually has a more significant impact on a child's psychological well-being compared to mother involvement [14]. Doherty et al. also note that father involvement, including warmth, supervision, gender role modeling, playtime, and encouraging bravery, is essential for a child's development [15].

Research conducted by Nurjanah, Jalal, and Supena illustrates the negative impact of a father's absence in daily life [16]. These include a lack of attachment between father and child, underdeveloped independence, behavioral control issues, low emotional intelligence, the formation of negative personality traits, difficulty in establishing or maintaining healthy relationships, and low psychological well-being [13].

The researcher acknowledges that studies on psychological well-being and father involvement have been widely conducted to help explain various contemporary issues. These include the studies from Ramadhani [17], Hannani [18], and Prihandini and Boediman [19]. These studies share similarities with this study, namely, they both used the variables of father involvement and psychological well-being. However, Ramadhani's study focused on adolescents [17], Hannani's study on women in emerging adulthood [18], and Prihandini and Boediman's study focused on early adolescence by adding the variable of self-esteem [19]. Unlike these studies, this study focuses on fulfilling psychological well-being from childhood to adolescence through

father involvement in parenting. Therefore, this study provides a novel contribution in explaining how early father involvement can prepare individuals to better face the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood.

Based on the background description above, this research problem is formulated as a study of the relationship between father involvement and psychological well-being in emerging adulthood.

2 Literature Review

Parenting involvement in children is still largely burdened on mothers. This is evidenced by interviews conducted by Asyâ and Ariyanto with several fathers who have elementary school-aged children [12]. The results showed that in their families, childcare responsibilities are still placed on the mother. The fathers cited their work obligations, lack of experience, and limited knowledge—often inherited from their own parents—as reasons for only being minimally involved in childcare. They also expressed the belief that a father's role is limited to being the breadwinner, which reinforces the notion that Indonesia is still in a state of “father emergency,” where fathers should in fact play a crucial role in the growth and development of their children throughout life [12]. In fact, Indonesia is often referred to as a 'fatherless country' because the level of father involvement in childcare is still very minimal [20]. The literature also shows that research on father involvement tends to focus on Western cultural contexts and rarely examines this phenomenon in depth in the Indonesian context [21]. This statement further demonstrates that Indonesia is in a state of 'father emergency,' where the continuity of children's development—from childhood to early adulthood, requires more substantive father participation.

Garcia, Sanchez, and Parra state that a father's involvement in parenting can foster emotional support and a sense of security, both of which contribute to an individual's level of psychological well-being [22]. When a father provides attention and support to his child and builds warm, close interactions, it can generate feelings of being accepted, valued, and reliable. This, in turn, improves psychological well-being, particularly in aspects of self-acceptance and social growth [23] [24]. Furthermore, when a father takes an active role in introducing, teaching, and encouraging the child to engage with the outside world, it helps the child recognize that beyond the home environment, there is a broader social environment they will eventually have to face.

A father's responsibility in disciplining the child is also a critical aspect of parental involvement. When fathers set boundaries and encourage responsible behavior, children learn to differentiate between right and wrong. This discipline and accountability help children control their behavior and environment, enabling them to function effectively in society. Such paternal involvement in discipline contributes to a child's psychological well-being and reduces delinquency and the prevalence of behavioral issues during adolescence [25].

Additionally, a father's involvement in academic aspects can motivate children to complete their studies, which positively impacts their psychological well-being. Research by Partasari, Lentari, and Priadi supports this, showing that paternal involvement in daughters influences their achievement motivation, while paternal involvement in sons affects the development of their motivation and aspirations for higher education [26]. The drive to achieve and pursue higher education can enhance children's psychological well-being, especially in terms of personal growth.

Fathers also serve as important role models, particularly for sons [27]. Fathers model both positive and negative behaviors, which children can easily imitate. For instance, when a father demonstrates the qualities of a responsible man, sons are likely to emulate these behaviors. For daughters, the father figure can influence their readiness for future romantic relationships or marriage [28]. The various influences of a father, as described, can support the development of children's cognitive, social, and creative capacities, as well as their psychological well-being [27].

An equally important aspect of father involvement is the harmony between father and mother. A family consists of the father, mother, and child, and if any part of this unit is misaligned, it may result in family dysfunction. Parental involvement, support, and the quality of family relationships have been shown to impact the psychological well-being of emerging adults [22]. Parental attachment, such as spending quality time together, showing affection, and listening to the child's stories and concerns, can enhance the child's ability to build positive relationships with others [29]. These positive relationships are key contributors to the development of psychological well-being.

In conclusion, the role of each parent is not limited to simply raising the child, but also includes being actively involved in the process. When a child's growth and development are adequately supported, all aspects of their psychological well-being are likely to function optimally, helping the child navigate each developmental stage successfully.

After knowing the background of the problem and theoretical review, the researcher proposed a hypothesis in the form of a positive relationship between father involvement and psychological well-being in emerging adulthood. The higher the level of father involvement in parenting, the higher the psychological well-being that emerging adulthood will have. Likewise, the lower the level of father involvement in parenting, the lower the psychological well-being they will have.

3 Method

Participant

This study uses the following criteria: (a) Male or Female (b) Aged 18-25 years. Researchers chose this age range because according to Arnett, a person experiences the emerging adulthood phase when they are in the age range of 18-25 years [2]. During this period, there is a transition between the adolescent phase and the adult phase so that in this development phase there are still characteristics of late adolescent development and characteristics of the early adult development phase begin to appear. Individuals who experience increased developmental tasks or responsibilities will be susceptible to mental disorders [4]. This is supported by the results of a study conducted by Trihastuti & Anindya which found that 54% of students were classified as less prosperous, 26% were classified as quite prosperous, 18% of students were classified as very less prosperous, 2% were classified as prosperous and no students had high psychological well-being [8].

(c) Having a father during childhood and adolescence. Researchers chose respondents who had fathers during childhood to adolescence because the theory underlying this study uses the perspective of children in the past regarding their parents, especially the behavior of fathers' parenting patterns that influence their behavior in the future [30]. Therefore, respondents who did not have a father since they were in the womb or did not have a picture of a father figure could not participate in this study. After collecting participant data from 263 respondents

according to the predetermined criteria, the following are the details of the results of the description of the research participant data that have been obtained:

Table 1. Description of Research Participants

Gender	% Male = 26.6 (n=70)
	% Female = 73.4 (n=193)
Age	% 18 years old = 6.1 (n=16)
	% 19 years old = 5.3 (n=14)
	% 20 years old = 10.3 (n=27)
	% 21 years old = 36.1 (n=95)
	% 22 years old = 21.3 (n=56)
	% 23 years old = 10.3 (n=27)
	% 24 years old = 6.5 (n=17)
	% 25 years old = 4.2 (n=11)

Measurement

The scale used to measure psychological well-being in this study is the Indonesian version of the psychological well-being measuring instrument that has been evaluated by Fadhil [31] referring to Ryff's standard scale [5]. The purpose of measuring this scale is to see the level of a person's psychological well-being. This scale consists of 29 items (15 favorable and 14 unfavorable) and uses 5 answer choices, namely Very Appropriate (5), Appropriate (4), Neutral (3), Not Appropriate (2), Very Not Appropriate (1). The reliability of the psychological well-being scale based on the Cronbach alpha coefficient is 0.865 and is declared valid.

The scale used to measure the level of father involvement is the Perceived Father Involvement Inventory (PFII) developed by Saliha and Jayan [30]. Then the author modified it to form a short form - Perceived Father Involvement Inventory (PFII) with the aim of reducing the level of respondent saturation when filling out the scale. This scale is built on the assumption that children's perspectives in the past regarding their parents, especially their father's parenting behavior, will affect children's behavior. If children's perceptions as teenagers that their fathers are very or less involved in parenting, it will greatly contribute to children's behavior in the future [30].

The researcher modified the item count to reduce respondent saturation during the scale filling process. This was achieved by ensuring that the KMO and Bartlett's test met the requirements. The KMO value obtained in this study was 0.861, or a KMO value >0.5 , while the Bartlett's test value was <0.001 , or a Bartlett's test value <0.05 , thus meeting both requirements. Afterward, the researcher selected three items with the highest factor loading values among all available items in each aspect using EFA (Exploratory Factor Analysis) to form a short form.

The Perceived Father Involvement Inventory (PFII) initially had 72 items (68 favorable and 4 unfavorable) which were summarized in 12 aspects, namely aspects of care, protection and provision, acceptance, understanding, guidance for the outside world, providing support, being responsible, academic assistance, discipline, spending time together, role models and aspects of the relationship with the mother. Next, it was modified into a short form - Perceived Father Involvement Inventory (PFII) which has 36 items where each aspect contains 3 items. This scale

uses 6 answer choices, namely Very Strongly Agree (6), Agree (5), Somewhat Agree (4), Somewhat Disagree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1).

The reliability of each aspect on this scale is based on the Cronbach alpha coefficient, namely the parenting aspect of 0.818, protection and provision of 0.829, acceptance of 0.813, understanding of 0.845, guidance for the outside world of 0.738, providing support of 0.896, being responsible of 0.876, academic assistance of 0.778, discipline of 0.810, spending time together of 0.876, role model of 0.893 and the aspect of relationship with the mother of 0.886.

4 Result

The assumption test is conducted before conducting the correlation test to determine whether the research data includes parametric statistics or non-parametric statistics. Therefore, an assumption test is conducted which includes a normality test and a linearity test as requirements that must be met. This analysis will be conducted using the help of the JAMOWI statistical program.

Table 2. Data Normality Test

Variable	p	Category
Father involvement	0.000	Not Normal
Psychological Well-Being	0.952	Normal

Based on the results of the normality test above, it is known that the variable of father involvement has a p value = <0.001 (not normal) and the variable of psychological well-being has a p value > 0.05 (normal) so it can be concluded that the data of this study can be said to be not normal because if the p value <0.05 then the data is stated to have a not normal distribution.

Table 3. Data Linearity Test

Variable	p	Category
Father involvement* Psychological Well-Being	$<.001$	Linear

Based on the results of the linearity test above, it can be concluded that the distribution of data from the independent variable (father involvement) has a significant and linear relationship with the dependent variable (psychological well-being). This is because the results of the analysis have a p value = < 0.001 , which means that if the p value <0.05 , the linearity assumption is met.

Hypothesis testing is carried out using analysis techniques to prove whether the research hypothesis is acceptable or not. Based on the results of the previous normality test, it is known that the data distribution is included in the data distribution that is not normally distributed so that this correlation test uses a nonparametric test with the Spearman's rho technique. The hypothesis is accepted if the significance level or p value is <0.05 . The results of the correlation test can be seen in the table below:

Table 4. Correlation Test

Variable	r	R ²	p	Note
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Father involvement* Psychological Well-Being	0.470	0.180	<.001	Positively Correlated
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In Table 4, the results of the correlation test show that father involvement has a positive and significant correlation with psychological well-being in emerging adulthood. This is because the level of significance is <0.001 or p-value <0.05 and has a positive correlation coefficient value of 0.470 so that the higher the father's involvement in parenting, the higher the psychological well-being of emerging adulthood. In addition, from the data above, it is also known that father involvement can explain 18% of the variation in psychological well-being significantly.

Table 5. Correlation Test of Aspects of Father Involvement and Aspects of Psychological Well-being

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R ²	r	p	Note
Parenting	Psychological Well-Being	0.122	0.364	< .001	Significant
Protection and provision		0.133	0.384	< .001	Significant
Acceptance		0.209	0.489	< .001	Significant
Understanding		0.221	0.459	< .001	Significant
Guide to the outside world		0.221	0.438	< .001	Significant
Providing support		0.232	0.486	< .001	Significant
Responsibility		0.234	0.393	< .001	Significant
Academic assistance		0.234	0.354	< .001	Significant
Discipline		0.234	0.438	< .001	Significant
Spending time together		0.235	0.396	< .001	Significant
Be a role model		0.235	0.426	< .001	Significant
Relationship with the Mother		0.243	0.416	< .001	Significant

Description: R² = coefficient of determination; r = correlation coefficient; p = level of significance

The results of the intercorrelation test analysis above show that each aspect of father involvement has a significant and positive correlation with psychological well-being. The aspect of the relationship with the mother provides the largest effective contribution to the child's psychological well-being, which is 24.3%. Then followed by the aspect of spending time together and the aspect of being a role model which has the same determination coefficient value, which is 23.5%.

Then the third aspect that provides the largest effective contribution to the child's psychological well-being is the aspect of academic assistance and the aspect of discipline with a determination coefficient of 23.4%. While the aspect that provides the smallest effective contribution to psychological well-being is the parenting aspect with a determination coefficient value of 12.2%.

Table 6. Correlation Test of Father Involvement and Psychological Well-being of Women's Group

Variable	r	R ²	p	Note
Father involvement* Psychological Well-Being	0.531	0.251	<.001	Positively Correlated

The results of the correlation test above show that father involvement has a positive and significant correlation with psychological well-being in the female group. This is because the level of significance is <0.001 or p-value <0.05 and has a positive correlation coefficient value of 0.531. In addition, from the data above it is also known that father involvement in the female group can explain 25.1% of the variation in psychological well-being significantly.

Table 7. Correlation Test of Father Involvement and Psychological Well-being of Male Group

Variable	r	R ²	p	Note
Father involvement* Psychological Well-Being	0.290	0.0347	0.015	Positively Correlated

In Table 7, the results of the correlation test show that father involvement has a positive correlation with psychological well-being in the male group. This is because the positive correlation coefficient value is 0.290 and has a significance level value of 0.015 or a p value <0.05 so that it can still be said to be significant even though it is low. In addition, from the data above it is also known that father involvement in the male group can explain 3.47% of the variation in psychological well-being.

5 Discussion

This study aims to empirically examine the relationship between father involvement and psychological well-being in emerging adulthood. A total of 263 participants were involved in this study. The correlation test used a non-parametric method with Spearman's rho technique, resulting in a correlation coefficient of 0.470 and a p-value of <0.001, indicating a positive and significant relationship between father involvement and psychological well-being. The positive relationship suggests that the higher the level of father involvement in parenting, the higher the psychological well-being of individuals in emerging adulthood.

Furthermore, based on the coefficient of determination through regression analysis, it was found that father involvement contributed 18% to psychological well-being, while the remaining 82% was attributed to other factors or variables not examined in this study.

These findings are consistent with several other studies, such as the research conducted by Utami [32], which found a positive and significant relationship between father involvement in parenting and psychological well-being, with an influence of 4.88%. Additionally, research by Ramadhani revealed that father involvement contributed 18.3% to a child's psychological well-being. More recent research by Hannani also reported a relationship between father involvement and psychological well-being among women in the emerging adulthood phase [18].

When the correlation test between father involvement and psychological well-being was conducted separately for male and female groups, it was found that the female group had a higher correlation between father involvement and psychological well-being compared to the male group, with correlation coefficients of 0.531 and 0.290, respectively. The higher correlation in the female group may be due to women having a greater need for their father's emotional and psychological support, which helps foster independence, resilience, and risk-taking abilities, thereby strengthening the correlation. Other studies have suggested that women tend to have higher psychological well-being than men, but they also require greater father involvement [5] [33].

An intercorrelation test between each aspect of father involvement and psychological well-being revealed that the aspect of "relationship with the mother" in the father involvement variable contributed the most significantly to the child's psychological well-being, at 24.3%. A positive, close, and harmonious relationship between the mother and father creates a strong family foundation and a positive family environment. Such an environment tends to help children develop better social skills, build healthy relationships, and cope with social pressures more effectively [34]. These social skills, relationships, and coping strategies are indicators of an individual's development of good psychological well-being in the future.

The aspects of the father as a role model and spending time with the child were the second most significant contributors to the child's psychological well-being. In Indonesia, the father, as the head of the family, is expected to be a role model for his children. A role model in this context means someone who teaches moral values and sets moral standards for their children [35]. Additionally, a father is responsible for spending time with his child, whether through play, interaction, or other activities, which can enhance the child's psychological well-being, especially in the future. Culpin et al. stated that the absence of a father during early or later childhood is associated with an increased likelihood of depressive symptoms at age 24, which indicates poor psychological well-being [36].

The aspect of discipline, responsibility, and academic support was the third most significant contributor to the child's psychological well-being. When fathers acknowledge their responsibility to ensure the child's life, instill discipline, and provide academic support, children learn self-regulation through the discipline given. They also become aware of their potential and continuously strive to develop it through the support and facilities provided by their father. Furthermore, they begin to understand the importance of taking responsibility for their life choices, modeled by their father's own sense of responsibility. These early life experiences will influence the child's psychological well-being in adulthood [37].

However, the aspect of caregiving had the smallest contribution to the child's psychological well-being, with an effective contribution of only 12.2%. This aspect includes how the father nurtures the child, expresses love, and maintains a close and warm relationship. Its relatively small contribution may be due to patriarchal cultural norms, where caregiving and household responsibilities are primarily seen as the mother's duty. As a result, the presence or absence of the father in the home may not be significantly perceived by the child [13].

Although this study shows that father involvement contributes 18% to psychological well-being, it is important to note that 82% of the variance is explained by other factors not examined here. Previous studies have demonstrated that psychological well-being in emerging adulthood is influenced by multiple variables, such as maternal involvement and the quality of family relationships [38], social support from peers [2], and self-esteem [39]. Other research also

highlights the role of religiosity and spirituality as protective factors in psychological well-being [40], as well as socioeconomic status and educational attainment [41]. Therefore, while father involvement is a significant predictor, psychological well-being in emerging adulthood is shaped by a complex interaction of family, personal, social, and cultural factors. Future studies are encouraged to incorporate these variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

The researcher acknowledges that this study is far from perfect and still has several limitations. One limitation is that the Perceived Father Involvement Inventory (PFII) lacks a clear time context and does not specify the subjects it is intended for, making it less suitable for measuring father involvement in emerging adulthood. Moreover, there were inconsistencies in the development of the PFII short form, such as the unmet KMO requirement and insufficient sample size (300–720 respondents) for its development. Additionally, the item statements in the PFII do not align well with the emerging adulthood population, reducing its accuracy in measuring father involvement in this age group.

6 Conclusion

Father involvement in parenting during childhood to adolescence has a positive and significant correlation with the psychological well-being of emerging adulthood. Then the aspect of father involvement that has the first largest effective contribution to the psychological well-being of the child is the aspect of the father's relationship with the mother. Then the aspect that provides the second largest contribution is the aspect of role models and the aspect of fathers spending time with their children. The third aspect that provides an effective contribution to psychological well-being is the aspect of discipline, academic assistance and the aspect of responsibility. While the aspect that has the lowest effective contribution to father involvement is the aspect of parenting.

In addition to these findings, this study highlights the urgent need to strengthen father involvement in Indonesian families, particularly within a cultural context where caregiving is often placed on mothers. Practically, the results can be implemented in family education programs, school-based parenting workshops, and policy initiatives that promote active father participation in caregiving, emotional support, and academic guidance. Strengthening father involvement may help address social issues such as the lack of paternal engagement, intergenerational transmission of parenting roles, and the increasing prevalence of psychological distress among young adults.

For future studies, it is recommended to examine other predictors of psychological well-being, such as maternal involvement, peer relationships, religiosity, socioeconomic factors, and self-esteem, to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Longitudinal studies are also needed to explore how father involvement across different developmental stages contributes to psychological well-being over time. Furthermore, refining measurement tools such as the PFII to better capture the experiences of emerging adults will improve the accuracy of future research.

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