

Identifying the Determinants of Effective Coparenting Among Dual-Earner Couples: A Qualitative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to identify and explain the determinants of effective coparenting among dual-earner couples in Indonesia.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study employed conventional qualitative content analysis. Participants were 24 individuals representing 12 dual-earner heterosexual couples in Indonesia, recruited through purposive sampling with maximum variation in age, occupation, education, duration of marriage, number of children, and work arrangements. Eligibility required both spouses to be employed, legally married, co-residing, and actively involved in parenting at least one dependent child. Data were collected through separate semi-structured, in-depth interviews with each spouse. Interviews lasted approximately 50–75 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed concurrently with data collection. Analysis involved repeated reading, identification of meaning units, open coding, constant comparison, categorization, abstraction, and development of overarching themes. MAXQDA was used for data management. Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were strengthened through maximum-variation sampling, reflexive memoing, audit trails, participant clarification, and secondary review of selected transcripts.

Findings: Analysis generated six interrelated determinants of effective coparenting: mutual commitment to shared parenting, constructive communication and coordinated decision-making, perceived fairness and flexible division of labor, emotional support and recognition of the partner, work-family boundary management, and family and sociocultural support context. Effective coparenting was characterized less by exact equality in parenting tasks than by shared responsibility, negotiated fairness, mutual reliability, adaptability, and acknowledgment of each partner's contribution. Five broader patterns of coparenting functioning also emerged: highly coordinated, adaptive but strained, asymmetrical, reactive, and externally supported coparenting. Workplace flexibility, predictable schedules, and supportive extended-family involvement facilitated cooperation, whereas rigid gender expectations, unacknowledged task imbalance, reactive communication, and unpredictable work demands undermined the parental alliance.

Conclusion: Effective coparenting among dual-earner couples is a dynamic and multidimensional process shaped by the interaction of relational, occupational, and sociocultural determinants, with shared responsibility, flexible coordination, and mutual recognition forming its central foundation.

Keywords: Coparenting, dual-earner couples, shared parenting, work-family balance, qualitative research, Indonesia

1. Introduction

The increasing participation of both mothers and fathers in paid employment has transformed the organization of family life and intensified scholarly interest in how couples coordinate parenting responsibilities while simultaneously managing occupational demands. Dual-earner families have become a prominent family form in many societies, creating new expectations regarding the distribution of childcare, emotional labor, household work, and decision-making between partners. Within these families, parenting is rarely an individual activity performed independently by mothers and fathers; instead, it is embedded within an interdependent relational system in which each parent's behavior, involvement, beliefs, and emotional responses shape the parenting practices of the other. This interdependence is captured by the concept of coparenting, which refers to the ways in which adults responsible for raising a child coordinate, support, negotiate, or undermine one another in their parental roles. Contemporary research increasingly treats coparenting as a central component of family functioning because it reflects not merely the quality of the couple relationship but the extent to which partners can establish a coherent and mutually supportive parental alliance (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2026).

Coparenting encompasses a range of relational processes, including agreement regarding childrearing, division of parental labor, mutual support, coordination of routines, management of disagreements, reinforcement or undermining of the other parent's authority, and joint management of family relationships. It is conceptually distinct from marital satisfaction and from the individual quality of parenting, although these domains are closely interconnected. A couple may experience conflict in their marital relationship while still maintaining effective coordination as parents, just as a relatively harmonious couple may encounter persistent difficulties in sharing childcare responsibilities or presenting consistent expectations to children. Evidence increasingly suggests that coparenting constitutes a unique relational mechanism through which the broader couple relationship influences parenting behavior and family outcomes (Güre et al., 2024; Wang & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2023). In this sense, effective coparenting may be understood as the ability of caregivers to communicate, collaborate, adapt, and preserve mutual respect while carrying out the practical and emotional responsibilities associated with raising children.

The quality of coparenting has important implications for both parents and children. Supportive coparenting has been associated with more consistent parenting, greater parental involvement, stronger parenting self-efficacy, and reduced psychological strain, whereas conflictual or undermining coparenting may amplify parental stress and weaken the capacity of parents to respond sensitively and consistently to children's needs. Research examining the interconnections among emotional regulation, parenting self-efficacy, and coparenting indicates that a supportive coparenting environment can strengthen parents' confidence in their caregiving roles and buffer difficulties associated with emotional dysregulation (Calabrese & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2023). Similarly, the quality of coparenting may influence the extent to which parenting stress translates into relational difficulties or problematic parenting processes (Richardson et al., 2021). These findings suggest that coparenting functions as both a relational resource and a regulatory mechanism within the family system.

The consequences of coparenting also extend to children's socioemotional, behavioral, and health-related outcomes. Distinct patterns of coparenting have been associated with differences in children's social-emotional adjustment, underscoring the importance of cooperative and low-conflict parenting alliances for child development (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2023). Coparenting quality may also influence specific aspects of the home environment that shape children's health, including feeding practices and the organization of the home food environment (Ramos et al., 2025). Moreover, supportive versus harsh caregiving practices within multigenerational households can affect children's behavioral adjustment, illustrating how cooperative caregiving relationships extend beyond the marital dyad when grandparents or other relatives participate in daily care (Chen et al., 2024). Systematic evidence concerning intergenerational coparenting similarly indicates that coordination between parents and grandparents may have meaningful implications for child development (Xu et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the view that coparenting should be examined as part of a broader relational ecology involving parents, children, extended family members, and external caregiving resources.

One of the most important dimensions of coparenting in dual-earner families is parental involvement, particularly father involvement. Changes in employment patterns, gender expectations, and norms surrounding fatherhood have increased expectations that fathers participate actively in daily caregiving rather than occupying a primarily

economic provider role. Contemporary fathering research emphasizes the increasing diversity of paternal roles and the need to move beyond traditional assumptions about fathers' involvement in family life (Volling & Palkovitz, 2021). Systematic evidence demonstrates that father involvement during early childhood is influenced by multiple individual, relational, and contextual factors, including paternal beliefs, couple functioning, employment conditions, and maternal behaviors (Diniz et al., 2021). Parenting self-efficacy is also an important correlate of fathers' engagement, particularly during the transition to parenthood, when new fathers are adapting simultaneously to caregiving expectations and occupational responsibilities (Moen & Burchardt, 2022).

The association between coparenting and father involvement appears to be reciprocal. Supportive coparenting may facilitate paternal participation by communicating trust, competence, and legitimacy, whereas restrictive or critical coparenting may discourage fathers from becoming more deeply involved. Longitudinal research has shown that supportive coparenting and father involvement can develop together over time, with parental characteristics shaping both processes (Park et al., 2024). Studies of dual-earner families also suggest that fathers' parenting and coparenting behaviors are influenced by traditional masculinity beliefs, nurturing role orientations, and maternal gatekeeping behaviors (Schoppe-Sullivan, Shafer, et al., 2021). Among fathers in economically constrained contexts, patterns of involvement may similarly reflect the interaction between family processes and broader structural conditions (Wang et al., 2025). These findings emphasize that involvement cannot be understood solely as an individual choice; rather, it is embedded in a relational environment in which each parent influences the other's opportunities and confidence to engage.

Maternal gatekeeping is particularly relevant to the study of coparenting because it represents the ways in which mothers may facilitate, regulate, restrict, or evaluate fathers' participation in parenting. Gatekeeping may emerge from beliefs about parental competence, gendered expectations, relationship insecurity, or concerns regarding control over the caregiving domain. Mothers' perceptions of fathers' parenting competence and grandmothers' involvement have been shown to influence gatekeeping behavior (Wang & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2021). Adult attachment orientations may also predict maternal gatekeeping, suggesting that individual relational histories contribute to how parenting responsibilities are negotiated between partners (Aytaç-DiCarlo & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2023). Jealousy within the

emerging parent-infant relationship represents another relational process that may contribute to gatekeeping and difficulties in forming a balanced parental alliance (Aytaç-DiCarlo & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2026; Olsavsky et al., 2020). Moreover, gatekeeping may have implications for child adjustment, particularly when combined with child temperament and other family vulnerabilities (Altenburger & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2021). Together, these findings indicate that effective coparenting requires attention not only to the observable division of tasks but also to the emotional and relational meanings attached to parental roles.

The organization of parental labor is especially complex in dual-earner households because both partners must continuously negotiate competing demands from work and family. The practical question of who performs childcare is inseparable from perceptions of fairness, recognition, flexibility, and workload. Studies of parent involvement suggest that families often adopt differentiated strategies for dividing responsibilities, and the effectiveness of these strategies may depend more on coordination and mutual acceptance than on strict equality (DeMartini & Hazen, 2023). Outsourcing domestic work can reduce practical burdens, but its implications for couple relationships are not uniformly positive, indicating that external assistance may both relieve and complicate negotiations over household responsibilities (Cheung & Lui, 2023). Emotional exhaustion may also be shaped by the interaction between childcare involvement and the availability of supportive relationships, particularly in dual-earner families where both mothers and fathers face sustained occupational and caregiving demands (Balenzano et al., 2025).

Employment conditions represent a further structural determinant of coparenting. Work schedules influence not only the amount of time parents spend with children but also the predictability of routines, the possibility of joint planning, and the distribution of unexpected caregiving tasks. Nonstandard work arrangements may increase parental distress, particularly when work schedules are poorly aligned with children's routines and the partner's availability; however, supportive coparenting may moderate some of these negative effects (Feng & Teti, 2025). Work arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic provided especially clear evidence of the relationship between employment flexibility and father involvement, as changes in location and schedule altered opportunities for fathers to participate in caregiving (Ni et al., 2023). More broadly, work-family arrangements affect how couples coordinate

care, manage stress, and adapt to changing family circumstances.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the fragility and adaptability of parenting arrangements within employed families. Sudden school closures, remote work, job insecurity, health concerns, and reduced access to childcare forced couples to renegotiate established divisions of labor. Research on mothers' experiences showed substantial adjustments in parenting roles and work expectations, often accompanied by increased strain and the redistribution of caregiving responsibilities (Childress et al., 2023). Studies of custodial fathers likewise demonstrated how changes in work and care responsibilities affected parental well-being under crisis conditions (Iztayeva, 2021). At the couple level, adaptive interparental processes were found to mitigate the risk of psychological aggression during periods of heightened pandemic-related stress, highlighting the protective role of relational coordination under pressure (Woodward et al., 2026). Such evidence demonstrates that coparenting is not static but evolves in response to changing external conditions.

Economic stressors may similarly influence parenting and coparenting processes. Family stress models suggest that financial strain can undermine caregiver well-being and, indirectly, children's adjustment through disruptions in family relationships and parenting processes (Heintz-Martin et al., 2021). For dual-earner couples, employment is therefore both a resource and a potential source of strain. Paid work may provide financial security and personal fulfillment, but conflicting schedules, workload intensity, and limited flexibility can reduce the time and emotional energy available for coordinated parenting. The extent to which couples can transform dual employment into a sustainable family arrangement may depend heavily on their ability to communicate proactively, negotiate responsibilities, and mobilize external resources.

Psychological well-being and couple satisfaction also play important roles in the coparenting process. Parents experiencing greater psychological distress may have more difficulty communicating constructively, responding flexibly, and supporting the other parent's role. Dyadic research indicates that couple satisfaction may mediate associations between parents' psychological distress and coparenting quality, emphasizing the interdependence of individual and relational functioning (Güre et al., 2024). New fathers' parenting satisfaction and stress are likewise affected by individual, couple, and contextual factors, illustrating the importance of understanding parental

adaptation as a multidimensional process (Schoppe-Sullivan, Nuttall, et al., 2021). Conflictual coparenting during the transition to parenthood may arise from combinations of couple, parent, and infant characteristics rather than from a single risk factor (Schoppe-Sullivan, Donithen, et al., 2021). Thus, the quality of coparenting reflects the cumulative effects of multiple relational and contextual influences.

Coparenting may also influence family functioning through domains that are not conventionally treated as coparenting outcomes. For example, the quality of the coparenting relationship has been linked with breastfeeding duration among dual-earner new parents, suggesting that parental coordination may influence health-related caregiving practices that require cooperation and support between partners (Yan et al., 2023). Father involvement may also reduce maternal stress through the mediating role of coparenting, indicating that practical involvement is most beneficial when embedded within a supportive parental alliance (d'Orsi et al., 2023). Families in which fathers assume primary caregiving roles further demonstrate that children's adjustment is not dependent on conventional gendered divisions of care, provided that parenting relationships and family functioning remain supportive (Jones et al., 2022). These findings challenge rigid assumptions concerning maternal and paternal roles and reinforce the importance of examining the quality of coordination rather than merely the quantity of care provided by each parent.

The broader social environment also shapes coparenting. Parents do not negotiate roles in isolation from cultural expectations regarding motherhood, fatherhood, masculinity, caregiving, and work. Fathers may experience social pressure to assume certain roles even when these expectations conflict with personal preferences or the practical realities of family life, and such perceived constraint may negatively affect coparenting quality (Favez et al., 2022). Cultural and institutional expectations can therefore influence whether shared parenting is experienced as voluntary, equitable, or imposed. Qualitative evidence regarding marginalized caregivers further highlights how caregiving labor may be shaped by social recognition, family expectations, and unequal distributions of responsibility (Xiao, 2026). In multigenerational family systems, coordination among mothers, grandmothers, and other caregivers may be especially consequential, and relationships among caregivers can affect caregiver-child

attachment and broader family functioning (Tan et al., 2024).

These dynamics are particularly important in Indonesia, where rapid socioeconomic change, urbanization, women's labor-force participation, intergenerational family ties, and enduring cultural expectations regarding gender and caregiving converge within family life. Dual-earner couples may experience tension between increasingly egalitarian expectations for shared parenting and persistent norms that assign mothers primary responsibility for childcare and fathers greater responsibility for economic provision. At the same time, extended-family involvement may provide substantial practical support, particularly through grandparents, while also introducing additional expectations regarding parenting practices and authority. The coexistence of changing employment patterns with strong family interdependence makes Indonesian dual-earner families a particularly relevant context for examining how effective coparenting is actually constructed and maintained in everyday life.

Despite the growing literature on coparenting, several limitations remain. Much existing research relies on quantitative designs focused on predefined variables such as parenting stress, father involvement, gatekeeping, couple satisfaction, or child adjustment. Although these studies provide important evidence regarding associations between coparenting and family outcomes, they may not fully capture how parents themselves understand effective coparenting or how multiple determinants are negotiated simultaneously in everyday life. Research also frequently focuses on the transition to parenthood or families with very young children, whereas coparenting continues to evolve as children's needs, employment circumstances, and family structures change. Further, recent work has emphasized the importance of examining coparenting from multiple perspectives rather than assuming that mothers and fathers experience the same relationship in identical ways (Wang et al., 2026). A qualitative approach can therefore provide a more integrated account of the meanings, practices, tensions, and contextual conditions through which effective coparenting is formed.

The need for qualitative inquiry is particularly strong among dual-earner couples because the determinants of coparenting are likely to operate across multiple levels simultaneously. Individual attachment patterns, parenting self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and beliefs about parental roles interact with couple-level communication, fairness, and conflict management. These relational

processes are further shaped by work arrangements, financial pressures, childcare resources, extended-family involvement, and sociocultural expectations. Studies of work, caregiving, and family adaptation have repeatedly shown that no single factor adequately explains how parents manage these competing demands (Balenzano et al., 2025; Feng & Teti, 2025). Understanding effective coparenting therefore requires attention to the dynamic configuration of resources and constraints through which couples organize parenting in real-world contexts.

A more contextualized understanding can also contribute to family interventions and workplace policy. If effective coparenting depends on communication, mutual recognition, flexibility, and shared responsibility, relationship education and parenting interventions may need to address the parental alliance rather than focusing exclusively on individual parenting skills. If workplace predictability and flexibility facilitate cooperative parenting, employers may also play an indirect role in strengthening family functioning. Likewise, when grandparents and other caregivers participate in childcare, interventions may benefit from considering intergenerational coordination rather than treating the couple as an isolated unit. Existing evidence concerning intergenerational caregiving, work arrangements, father involvement, and supportive relationships indicates that the quality of coparenting emerges from an interaction between family relationships and the structural conditions in which those relationships operate (Ni et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2024).

Accordingly, there is a need to move beyond fragmented examination of isolated predictors and develop a more comprehensive, experience-based understanding of the determinants that enable dual-earner couples to function effectively as a parenting team. Such an approach can illuminate how couples define fairness, how they negotiate temporary imbalances, how they respond to occupational pressures, how they preserve mutual authority in front of children, and how they integrate support from extended family or formal childcare. It can also reveal determinants that may be overlooked when research begins with predetermined quantitative constructs. Examining these processes within the Indonesian context can contribute culturally grounded evidence to an international literature that has increasingly recognized coparenting as a central mechanism linking couple relationships, parental well-being, involvement, and child development.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to identify and explain the determinants of effective coparenting among

dual-earner couples in Indonesia through an in-depth qualitative inquiry.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design using a conventional qualitative content analysis approach to identify and explain the determinants of effective coparenting among dual-earner couples in Indonesia. A qualitative approach was selected because effective coparenting is a multidimensional and context-dependent phenomenon shaped by interpersonal relationships, marital dynamics, occupational demands, parenting beliefs, family expectations, and sociocultural circumstances. The study sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of how employed mothers and fathers experience the coordination of parenting responsibilities and how they perceive the individual, relational, occupational, familial, and contextual factors that facilitate effective coparenting. The study was conducted among dual-earner couples residing in Indonesia. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling with maximum variation to obtain diverse experiences in terms of age, duration of marriage, number and age of children, occupational sector, working arrangements, educational background, and length of employment. The final sample consisted of 24 participants representing 12 dual-earner heterosexual couples. Both partners in each participating couple were engaged in paid employment and had at least one dependent child living in the same household. Participants were eligible for inclusion if they were legally married, both spouses were currently employed either full-time or part-time, they had lived together for at least two years, they had at least one child younger than 18 years, and both partners were actively involved in childcare and parenting-related decisions. Participants were also required to be able to communicate adequately in Bahasa Indonesia and to provide informed consent for participation and audio recording. Couples were excluded if one partner was temporarily unemployed at the time of data collection, if they were separated or involved in ongoing divorce proceedings, if their children did not ordinarily reside in the household, or if circumstances prevented meaningful participation in an in-depth interview. Recruitment continued concurrently with data collection and analysis until informational redundancy was achieved and subsequent interviews no longer generated substantively new concepts or dimensions related to the determinants of

effective coparenting. Data saturation was judged to have occurred after interviews with 11 couples; however, one additional couple was interviewed to confirm saturation and strengthen the diversity and completeness of the dataset. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed of the objectives of the study, the confidentiality of their information, their right to decline to answer any question, and their right to withdraw from the study without consequence. Personal identifiers were removed during transcription, and participant codes were used throughout the analytic process to protect confidentiality.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected through individual semi-structured, in-depth interviews using an interview guide developed specifically for the objectives of the study. Individual interviews were conducted separately with each spouse rather than interviewing couples jointly, thereby allowing participants to describe their personal experiences, concerns, disagreements, perceptions of their partner, and family practices without pressure to present a mutually acceptable account in the presence of their spouse. The interview guide was developed following a review of the conceptual literature on coparenting, work-family interaction, marital relationships, division of parental labor, parenting coordination, and the experiences of dual-earner families. The initial interview guide was reviewed for clarity, relevance, comprehensiveness, and cultural appropriateness by experts familiar with family studies, psychology, qualitative methodology, and parenting research. Minor revisions were subsequently made to improve the sequencing and openness of the questions. The interviews began with broad questions concerning participants' experiences of raising children while both spouses were employed and gradually progressed toward more focused questions regarding the distribution of childcare responsibilities, communication about parenting, joint decision-making, agreement and disagreement over child-rearing practices, support received from the spouse, management of work and family schedules, conflict resolution, emotional support, perceptions of fairness, and the role of extended family and workplace conditions. Participants were also asked to describe situations in which cooperation between spouses worked particularly well or became difficult, the strategies they used to coordinate parental responsibilities, and the conditions they believed were necessary for an effective coparenting relationship.

Probing questions such as “Can you explain that experience in more detail?”, “What usually happens when you and your spouse disagree about parenting?”, “How does your employment affect the way parenting responsibilities are shared?”, and “What makes cooperation in parenting easier or more difficult?” were used when necessary to elicit detailed descriptions and clarify participants' meanings. The semi-structured format ensured that comparable domains were discussed across interviews while allowing participants to introduce experiences and determinants not anticipated by the researchers.

Interviews were conducted at a time and in a setting that provided privacy and convenience for each participant. Depending on participant preference and logistical feasibility, interviews were conducted either face-to-face in a private location or through a secure online video-conferencing platform. Each interview lasted approximately 50 to 75 minutes. With participants' permission, all interviews were digitally audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim in Bahasa Indonesia. Field notes were recorded immediately following each interview to document contextual information, nonverbal observations where applicable, preliminary analytic impressions, and potentially important issues to be explored in subsequent interviews. Data collection and preliminary analysis proceeded simultaneously, enabling the interview guide to remain responsive to emerging concepts. As particular issues became analytically important, such as perceived fairness in parental workload, flexibility of work schedules, mutual recognition of occupational pressures, involvement of grandparents, and discrepancies in parenting expectations, subsequent participants were invited to elaborate more extensively on these issues. To enhance credibility, the interviewer used clarification and summarization during the interviews to verify the intended meaning of participants' statements. Selected interpretations were also informally checked with participants during interviews by restating their views and inviting correction or elaboration. All recordings, transcripts, and analytic documents were stored securely and were accessible only to the research team.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using conventional qualitative content analysis through an iterative process of immersion in the data, open coding, categorization, abstraction, and development of overarching themes. Analysis began

immediately after the first interviews and proceeded concurrently with further data collection. Each audio recording was listened to and compared with its verbatim transcript to ensure transcription accuracy. The transcripts were then read repeatedly to achieve immersion in the participants' accounts and to develop an overall understanding of their coparenting experiences. During the initial coding stage, meaning units consisting of words, sentences, or passages related to conditions that facilitated or hindered effective coparenting were identified. These meaning units were condensed while preserving their underlying meaning and were assigned descriptive codes that remained as close as possible to the participants' experiences. Coding was initially inductive, and no predetermined theoretical categories were imposed on the data. Similar codes were subsequently compared, grouped, and reorganized into preliminary subcategories according to conceptual similarity and differences. Through constant comparison within and across interviews, the research team examined patterns shared by mothers and fathers as well as divergent experiences associated with occupational demands, gender-role expectations, family structure, and parenting circumstances. Subcategories were progressively integrated into broader categories representing related determinants of effective coparenting. At a higher level of abstraction, relationships among categories were examined to identify overarching themes capturing the principal individual, couple-level, work-related, family-related, and sociocultural conditions that shaped the quality of coparenting among dual-earner couples.

The analytic process was recursive rather than strictly linear. Codes and categories were continually reviewed against the original transcripts, and earlier interviews were recoded when concepts emerging from later interviews provided a more precise understanding of participants' experiences. Memos were maintained throughout the analysis to document coding decisions, category development, conceptual relationships, emerging interpretations, and changes made to the coding framework. Qualitative data management and coding were conducted using MAXQDA software, which facilitated systematic organization of transcripts, codes, memos, categories, and retrieval of relevant text segments. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were considered throughout the study. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the interview material, purposive maximum-variation sampling, iterative

questioning, constant comparison, and participant clarification during data collection. Dependability was supported by maintaining a detailed audit trail documenting recruitment procedures, interview-guide development, coding decisions, revisions to categories, and the progression from initial codes to final themes. To improve analytic consistency, a subset of transcripts was independently reviewed and coded by a second researcher with experience in qualitative research, after which coding differences were discussed until conceptual agreement was reached. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive memoing and repeated comparison of interpretations with participants' original statements to minimize the influence of researchers' assumptions. Transferability was supported by collecting participants with heterogeneous demographic, occupational, and family characteristics and by providing sufficiently detailed descriptions of the study context, participant selection, data collection, and analytic procedures. Final themes were accepted only when they were internally coherent, clearly distinguishable from other themes, supported by multiple participants, and adequately grounded in the interview data. Analysis continued until the research team agreed that the resulting thematic structure provided a comprehensive representation of the determinants shaping effective coparenting among the participating dual-earner couples.

3. Findings and Results

The final sample consisted of 24 participants representing 12 dual-earner heterosexual couples residing in Indonesia. The participants included 12 women and 12 men, all of whom were engaged in paid employment and shared responsibility for at least one dependent child living in the household. Participants ranged in age from 29 to 46 years,

with a mean age of approximately 36.8 years. The duration of marriage ranged from 4 to 19 years, and the couples had between one and three children. Most participants had one or two children, although several families had three children of different developmental ages. The age of the youngest child ranged from 2 to 13 years, thereby allowing the study to capture coparenting experiences extending from early childhood to early adolescence. Participants represented a range of occupational backgrounds, including education, healthcare, banking and financial services, public administration, information technology, retail and private-sector management, engineering, and self-employed professional work. Fifteen participants worked predominantly fixed schedules, whereas nine had flexible, rotating, hybrid, or otherwise variable working arrangements. The educational background of the participants ranged from diploma-level qualifications to postgraduate education, with the majority holding a bachelor's degree. Household arrangements also varied. Seven couples relied at least occasionally on extended-family assistance, particularly grandparents, while five managed childcare primarily through the spouses themselves, formal childcare services, or school-based arrangements. Although all couples described some degree of work-family pressure, the intensity of perceived strain varied considerably according to working hours, commuting demands, children's ages, availability of external support, and the extent to which parenting responsibilities were perceived as fairly distributed. Analysis of the interviews generated 276 initial codes. Through comparison, condensation, and abstraction, these codes were organized into 18 subcategories and subsequently integrated into six major themes representing the determinants of effective coparenting among dual-earner couples.

Table 1

Major Themes, Subcategories, and Representative Indicators of Effective Coparenting

Major Theme	Subcategories	Representative Indicators Identified in the Interviews
Mutual Commitment to Shared Parenting	Shared parental responsibility; joint ownership of parenting tasks; prioritization of children's needs	Both parents regarded childcare as a shared obligation; neither parent viewed the other as merely assisting; responsibilities were adjusted according to daily circumstances; both partners remained actively involved in important parenting decisions
Constructive Communication and Coordinated Decision-Making	Open communication; advance planning; conflict resolution; consistent parenting decisions	Couples discussed schedules and children's needs regularly; decisions were negotiated rather than imposed; disagreements were addressed privately; parents attempted to present consistent expectations to children
Perceived Fairness and Flexible Division of Labor	Equitable workload; role flexibility; responsiveness to changing demands	Tasks were divided according to availability, competence, and workload rather than rigid gender roles; temporary imbalances were accepted when considered justified; partners compensated for one another during periods of occupational pressure

Emotional Support and Recognition of the Partner	Empathy; appreciation; validation of effort; protection of the parental alliance	Partners acknowledged each other's fatigue and workload; appreciation reduced resentment; criticism was limited in front of children; spouses supported each other's legitimacy and authority as parents
Work-Family Boundary Management	Workplace flexibility; schedule coordination; boundary setting; recovery from work demands	Flexible working arrangements facilitated caregiving; couples coordinated shifts and leave; work intrusion into family time was actively managed; parents attempted to preserve regular family routines despite occupational demands
Family and Sociocultural Support Context	Extended-family assistance; childcare resources; cultural expectations; social support	Grandparents and trusted caregivers reduced overload; access to childcare increased stability; traditional expectations sometimes intensified unequal role allocation; supportive social networks strengthened couples' capacity to maintain cooperative parenting

As shown in Table 1, effective coparenting was not described by participants as a single behavior or isolated marital skill but as a multidimensional relational process sustained by the interaction of six major determinants. The first theme, mutual commitment to shared parenting, constituted the foundation of the emerging structure. Participants repeatedly distinguished between a spouse who “helped” with parenting and a spouse who considered parenting to be his or her own responsibility. Couples who described their coparenting as effective tended to speak of childcare, school responsibilities, discipline, health-related decisions, and emotional care as matters belonging to both parents. Shared responsibility did not necessarily mean an equal division of every task. Rather, participants emphasized a shared sense of ownership in which each partner could be relied upon to recognize children's needs and respond without having to be repeatedly instructed by the other spouse.

Constructive communication and coordinated decision-making formed the second major theme and were particularly important when occupational demands changed unexpectedly. Participants described routine discussions concerning school schedules, transportation, children's extracurricular activities, household duties, medical appointments, and work obligations as mechanisms through which potential conflict could be prevented. Effective coparenting was associated not only with frequent communication but also with the quality of communication. Couples who reported better cooperation tended to describe discussions as anticipatory, specific, and problem-oriented rather than accusatory. They also attempted to manage disagreements away from the children and to avoid openly contradicting one another in situations involving rules or discipline. Thus, consistency in parenting emerged not as complete agreement between spouses but as an ability to negotiate differences without weakening the authority or legitimacy of the other parent.

The third theme, perceived fairness and flexible division of labor, was one of the most frequently discussed issues across both male and female interviews. Participants did not

define fairness simply as numerical equality in time or task allocation. Instead, fairness was interpreted in relation to each partner's workload, commuting demands, working hours, physical fatigue, and temporary pressures. Effective couples described the ability to redistribute responsibilities when circumstances changed. For example, one spouse could assume a larger share of morning routines during the other partner's intensive work period, with the arrangement reversing when occupational demands shifted. By contrast, persistent asymmetry without acknowledgment or renegotiation tended to generate resentment and reduce willingness to cooperate. Emotional support and recognition of the partner were closely connected with these perceptions of fairness. Participants frequently indicated that difficult periods were more manageable when their spouse recognized their effort, expressed appreciation, and responded empathically to fatigue or stress. Such recognition appeared to function as a relational resource that reduced the emotional consequences of temporary imbalance.

The fifth major theme concerned work-family boundary management. Participants' experiences indicated that employment affected coparenting not merely through the number of hours spent at work but through the predictability, flexibility, and permeability of work demands. Flexible scheduling, the possibility of working from home, supportive supervisors, predictable shifts, and access to parental leave were described as facilitating coordinated parenting. Conversely, long commutes, overtime, last-minute assignments, rotating shifts, and the expectation of constant digital availability created strain and required greater coordination between spouses. Finally, the wider family and sociocultural support context influenced how effectively couples could sustain cooperative parenting. Extended-family support, particularly from grandparents, was highly valued when it supplemented rather than displaced parental coordination. However, some participants also described tensions arising when extended-family members imposed expectations regarding gender roles or childrearing. In this sense, the broader social context could

operate either as a resource or as an additional source of pressure depending on whether external involvement supported or undermined the couple's own parental alliance.

Table 2

Distribution of Coded References Across Major Themes and Subcategories

Major Theme	Subcategory	Number of Coded References	Participants Mentioning the Subcategory, n (%)
Mutual Commitment to Shared Parenting	Shared parental responsibility	31	23 (95.8)
	Joint ownership of parenting tasks	24	21 (87.5)
	Prioritization of children's needs	18	18 (75.0)
Constructive Communication and Coordinated Decision-Making	Open communication	28	22 (91.7)
	Advance planning	21	19 (79.2)
	Conflict resolution	17	17 (70.8)
	Consistent parenting decisions	15	16 (66.7)
Perceived Fairness and Flexible Division of Labor	Equitable workload	27	22 (91.7)
	Role flexibility	23	20 (83.3)
	Responsiveness to changing demands	18	18 (75.0)
Emotional Support and Recognition of the Partner	Empathy	16	17 (70.8)
	Appreciation and validation	14	15 (62.5)
	Protection of the parental alliance	11	13 (54.2)
Work-Family Boundary Management	Workplace flexibility	19	18 (75.0)
	Schedule coordination	15	16 (66.7)
	Boundary setting	12	13 (54.2)
Family and Sociocultural Support Context	Extended-family and childcare support	12	14 (58.3)
	Cultural and gender-role expectations	5	9 (37.5)
Total		316	

Table 2 provides a more detailed account of the relative prominence of the subcategories across the interviews. Although frequency was not used as a substitute for interpretive importance, the distribution of coded references demonstrated that some determinants were especially pervasive across the sample. Shared parental responsibility was the most widely endorsed subcategory, appearing in the accounts of 23 of the 24 participants. This finding indicated that the perception of parenting as a jointly owned responsibility was almost universal among participants

when they described effective coparenting. Open communication and equitable workload were also highly prominent and were each discussed by more than 90% of participants. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of coparenting depended heavily on whether spouses could both coordinate parenting through communication and maintain a division of labor that was experienced as fair.

Role flexibility was identified by 20 participants and emerged particularly strongly among couples with variable work schedules. Participants emphasized that rigid task

specialization became difficult to maintain when children became ill, schools changed schedules, employment demands increased, or unexpected caregiving needs arose. Couples who adapted more effectively described parenting roles as negotiable and responsive to circumstances. Advance planning was similarly important and was mentioned by 19 participants. Planning often involved weekly or daily discussions, shared digital calendars, messaging applications, or routine conversations concerning school and work commitments. However, participants also emphasized that planning was useful only when accompanied by flexibility because parenting demands were inherently unpredictable.

The emotional dimensions of coparenting, although somewhat less frequently coded than coordination and division of labor, were described as important for maintaining cooperation over time. Seventeen participants identified empathy as essential during periods of exhaustion, occupational strain, or disagreement, whereas 15 discussed the importance of appreciation and validation. Participants frequently explained that practical support had a different emotional meaning when accompanied by acknowledgment of the other spouse's effort. Protection of the parental alliance, mentioned by 13 participants, referred to avoiding ridicule, criticism, or direct contradiction of the other parent in front of children. Participants considered this especially important in maintaining consistency and preventing children from perceiving one parent as less authoritative.

Workplace flexibility was identified by 18 participants and was especially salient among families in which at least one parent had access to hybrid work, adjustable schedules,

or supportive leave arrangements. In contrast, participants working fixed or unpredictable shifts often described greater dependence on advance coordination and external support. Schedule coordination was discussed by 16 participants and functioned as an operational mechanism linking work demands with parenting responsibilities. Boundary setting, although mentioned by a smaller proportion of the sample, was particularly relevant among participants whose jobs involved after-hours digital communication. Some reported that the absence of clear boundaries between work and family increased irritability, reduced parental availability, and shifted responsibilities unexpectedly to the spouse.

The least frequently mentioned but analytically meaningful subcategory concerned cultural and gender-role expectations. Nine participants explicitly described traditional assumptions that mothers should remain primarily responsible for routine childcare even when both partners worked. Although this subcategory generated fewer coded references than the relational themes, it helped explain why some couples experienced persistent imbalance despite expressing a general commitment to shared parenting. Extended-family and childcare support was mentioned by 14 participants and was usually described positively when assistance provided temporary relief without interfering with parental decision-making. Overall, the pattern of coded references indicated that effective coparenting was most strongly grounded in shared responsibility, communication, fairness, flexibility, and recognition, while workplace and sociocultural conditions shaped the extent to which couples were able to enact these relational capacities in daily life.

Table 3

Patterns of Coparenting Functioning According to Relational and Work-Family Conditions

Coparenting Pattern	Dominant Characteristics	Typical Work-Family Context	Coparenting Consequences
Highly Coordinated Coparenting	Strong shared responsibility, frequent communication, flexible task allocation, high mutual appreciation	Predictable or flexible work arrangements; access to support; manageable work-family boundaries	High consistency in parenting, low resentment, rapid adaptation to changing family demands, strong parental alliance
Adaptive but Strained Coparenting	Good commitment and communication but recurring pressure related to workload, childcare, or time scarcity	Long working hours, commuting demands, temporary workload peaks, limited external support	Generally effective cooperation with periodic conflict, fatigue, and temporary imbalance
Asymmetrical Coparenting	One parent carries the majority of routine and invisible parenting responsibilities; limited renegotiation of roles	Traditional gender-role expectations, inflexible employment patterns, unequal schedule control	Increased resentment, emotional exhaustion, recurrent conflict, perceptions of unfairness
Reactive Coparenting	Parenting coordination occurs mainly after problems arise; limited advance planning; inconsistent communication	Unpredictable schedules, frequent overtime, fragmented routines	Greater misunderstanding, inconsistent discipline, last-minute task transfer, heightened stress
Externally Supported Coparenting	Considerable reliance on grandparents, childcare services, schools, or domestic support while parental coordination remains intact	High occupational demands but relatively strong family or formal support network	Reduced overload and improved schedule stability when external support complements rather than replaces parental cooperation

Table 3 demonstrates that the six determinants identified in the thematic analysis combined in different ways to produce distinguishable patterns of coparenting functioning. Highly coordinated coparenting was characterized by a mutually reinforcing configuration of shared responsibility, communication, flexibility, appreciation, and manageable work-family boundaries. Couples within this pattern did not necessarily experience low occupational demands; rather, they appeared to possess relational and structural resources that allowed them to adjust effectively when demands intensified. Participants in this pattern commonly described rapid redistribution of parenting tasks, routine consultation, and confidence that their partner would respond when family circumstances changed. Their descriptions suggested that trust in the partner's dependability was as important as the precise division of tasks.

The adaptive but strained pattern illustrated that effective coparenting could coexist with substantial stress. These couples generally demonstrated mutual commitment and constructive communication, yet experienced recurring periods in which occupational deadlines, commuting, inadequate childcare, or children's needs created temporary imbalances. Unlike the asymmetrical pattern, these imbalances were usually recognized as situational and were accompanied by attempts to compensate later. Participants in this group frequently described exhaustion and periodic disagreement but did not interpret temporary inequality as evidence that their spouse rejected shared responsibility. Recognition of circumstances therefore appeared to moderate the negative impact of unequal task distribution.

The asymmetrical pattern was associated with a more persistent concentration of routine parenting and household coordination in one partner. This pattern was particularly evident when occupational flexibility differed considerably between spouses or when traditional gender expectations remained influential. Female participants were more likely to describe the accumulation of "invisible" organizational tasks, such as monitoring school requirements, remembering

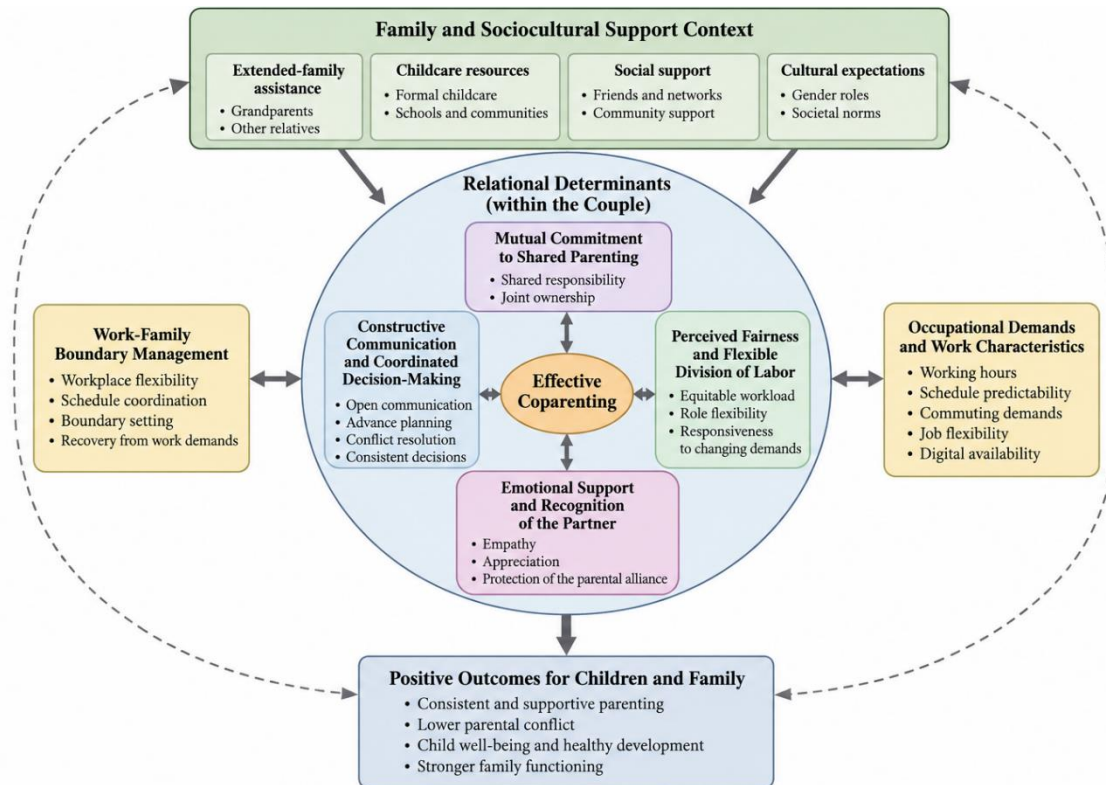
appointments, preparing children's belongings, and anticipating family needs, even when their male partners participated in visible childcare activities. Where such differences were not openly acknowledged or renegotiated, perceptions of unfairness intensified and were associated with emotional withdrawal, criticism, and reduced willingness to cooperate.

Reactive coparenting represented a pattern in which parents remained involved but lacked anticipatory coordination. These couples tended to communicate when an immediate problem occurred rather than planning responsibilities in advance. Participants described last-minute messages, uncertainty about who would collect children, confusion regarding school activities, and disagreement over discipline after an incident had already occurred. The absence of regular coordination appeared to amplify the impact of otherwise manageable occupational pressures. Consequently, the findings suggested that communication functioned not only as a means of conflict resolution but also as a preventive mechanism that protected the coparenting relationship from avoidable strain.

The externally supported pattern demonstrated the importance of contextual resources. Couples receiving regular assistance from grandparents, childcare providers, schools, or other trusted individuals were often able to sustain employment demands without excessive strain. However, external support facilitated effective coparenting only when both spouses retained responsibility for decision-making and coordination. Where one spouse delegated family management almost entirely to extended family, external support did not necessarily strengthen the parental alliance. Participants therefore differentiated between support that expanded the couple's caregiving capacity and support that substituted for one partner's involvement. This distinction reinforces the finding that effective coparenting was primarily relational but depended substantially on the surrounding work and family environment.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Determinants of Effective Coparenting Among Dual-Earner Couples



The conceptual model summarized in Figure 1 indicates that effective coparenting emerged from the interaction of determinants operating at interconnected relational, occupational, and contextual levels. At the center of the model was the shared parental alliance, reflected in mutual commitment to parenting, coordinated decision-making, and protection of each partner's parental legitimacy. This core relational system was strengthened by perceptions of fairness, flexibility in dividing responsibilities, and emotional recognition of the partner's contribution. These processes operated dynamically rather than independently. For example, communication facilitated negotiation of a fair division of labor, whereas appreciation increased willingness to respond flexibly when one spouse experienced greater occupational demands. Conversely, weak communication could transform temporary imbalance into a persistent perception of unfairness, thereby undermining cooperation.

The model further indicated that work-family boundary management influenced the couple's ability to translate relational commitment into everyday parenting practice. Flexible schedules, predictable working hours, supportive supervisors, and manageable digital demands expanded the time and psychological availability required for parental

coordination. In contrast, unpredictable or highly intrusive work demands increased the need for communication and role flexibility while simultaneously reducing the resources available for these processes. Accordingly, occupational conditions did not directly determine whether coparenting would be effective; their influence depended partly on the couple's capacity to anticipate, negotiate, and adapt to work-related constraints.

The outer contextual level consisted of extended-family resources, formal childcare arrangements, social networks, and sociocultural expectations. Supportive external resources could reduce parenting overload and increase the stability of family routines, particularly when both spouses faced intensive occupational demands. At the same time, social norms concerning motherhood, fatherhood, and gendered responsibility could shape expectations regarding who should perform particular parenting tasks. These expectations became problematic when they conflicted with the practical demands of dual employment or resulted in one partner assuming disproportionate responsibility. The model therefore portrays effective coparenting as an adaptive system in which individual acts of support are embedded within a broader network of couple processes, employment conditions, and social expectations.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that effective coparenting among dual-earner couples was characterized less by exact equality in parenting tasks than by shared responsibility, negotiated fairness, responsiveness, and a sense of mutual reliability. Participants consistently emphasized that daily parenting required continual adjustment rather than a fixed division of duties. Couples functioned more effectively when both partners regarded themselves as equally accountable for the overall parenting system even if specific responsibilities differed at particular times. The findings further show that communication and emotional recognition played a critical role in interpreting these differences. Temporary inequality was usually tolerated when it was perceived as necessary, acknowledged by the partner, and open to future rebalancing. In contrast, persistent imbalance became detrimental when it was experienced as entitlement, indifference, or lack of recognition.

A further important finding was that coparenting effectiveness could not be understood independently of the conditions under which couples worked. Employment did not uniformly undermine family cooperation. Participants with demanding jobs could still describe strong coparenting when they had predictable schedules, flexibility, partner support, and access to childcare resources. Conversely, even moderate employment demands could create conflict when schedules were unpredictable, responsibilities were poorly communicated, or one parent had little control over working time. Thus, the findings point to an interaction between relational competence and structural opportunity. Effective coparenting required both a cooperative parental relationship and sufficient flexibility within the couple's social and occupational environment to enact that cooperation consistently.

Overall, the qualitative analysis identified a coherent structure in which mutual commitment, communication, fairness, emotional support, work-family boundary management, and contextual support jointly shaped coparenting quality. These determinants were interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The most effective coparenting relationships were those in which spouses shared responsibility for the parenting system, communicated proactively, adapted the division of labor to changing circumstances, recognized each other's efforts, protected the parental alliance, and mobilized available occupational and family resources without surrendering their own responsibility as parents. Conversely, ineffective or strained coparenting was associated with

unacknowledged asymmetry, rigid gender expectations, reactive communication, unpredictable work demands, inadequate boundaries, and external involvement that failed to support the couple's own coordination. The resulting findings provide a multidimensional explanation of effective coparenting among Indonesian dual-earner couples and establish an empirical foundation for interpreting the relational and contextual processes through which employed parents sustain cooperative childrearing.

4. Discussion

The present qualitative study identified six interrelated determinants of effective coparenting among dual-earner couples in Indonesia: mutual commitment to shared parenting, constructive communication and coordinated decision-making, perceived fairness and flexible division of labor, emotional support and recognition of the partner, work-family boundary management, and family and sociocultural support context. Taken together, the findings indicate that effective coparenting is not defined by a rigidly equal distribution of parenting tasks, but rather by a relational process in which both partners perceive themselves as jointly responsible for childrearing, remain responsive to changing family and occupational demands, and preserve a sense of mutual reliability and fairness. The findings also show that effective coparenting is embedded in broader structural conditions, particularly work schedules, childcare resources, extended-family involvement, and cultural expectations. This multidimensional pattern is consistent with contemporary conceptualizations of coparenting as a family-level process that is related to, but distinct from, individual parenting behavior and general couple functioning (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2026). The results therefore extend prior research by illustrating how these determinants are experienced and integrated in the daily lives of dual-earner couples.

The first and most fundamental finding concerned mutual commitment to shared parenting. Participants repeatedly distinguished between a spouse who merely “helped” with children and a spouse who regarded parenting as a jointly owned responsibility. This distinction suggests that effective coparenting begins at the level of parental identity and role definition. When both partners understood themselves as legitimate and accountable caregivers, responsibility for children was less likely to be framed as belonging primarily to one parent. This finding is consistent with research showing that father involvement is influenced by beliefs

about paternal roles, parenting competence, and the relational context created by the other parent (Diniz et al., 2021; Moen & Burchardt, 2022). It also aligns with evidence that traditional masculinity beliefs and maternal gate closing can constrain fathers' parenting and coparenting behaviors in dual-earner families (Schoppe-Sullivan, Shafer, et al., 2021). The present findings suggest that shared responsibility functions as a core organizing principle because it establishes an expectation that both partners should anticipate children's needs rather than wait to be directed by the other spouse.

This interpretation is further supported by studies showing that paternal involvement and supportive coparenting develop in reciprocal ways over time (Park et al., 2024). When fathers are actively involved and treated as competent parents, the coparenting relationship may become more collaborative; conversely, a supportive coparenting environment can increase opportunities for paternal involvement. The present participants' descriptions of joint ownership also resonate with findings from families in which fathers assume primary caregiving responsibilities, demonstrating that healthy child and family functioning does not require conventional gendered divisions of care (Jones et al., 2022). Rather, what appears to matter is whether caregiving arrangements are understood, accepted, and coordinated by the adults involved. This is especially relevant in dual-earner families, where employment demands make strict adherence to traditional maternal and paternal roles increasingly difficult to sustain.

The second major finding was the importance of constructive communication and coordinated decision-making. Participants described proactive communication as necessary for managing school schedules, transportation, work commitments, discipline, medical appointments, and unexpected caregiving needs. Importantly, communication was not valued merely because couples talked frequently, but because it facilitated anticipation, negotiation, and consistency. This finding supports prior evidence that coparenting quality is closely associated with parenting behavior and that mothers and fathers may experience the same coparenting relationship differently (Wang et al., 2026; Wang & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2023). It also corresponds with evidence that conflictual coparenting emerges from the interaction of couple, parent, and child characteristics, rather than from disagreement alone (Schoppe-Sullivan, Donithen, et al., 2021). The current results therefore suggest that disagreement is not inherently detrimental. Instead, the crucial distinction lies in whether couples can discuss

differences without undermining one another's parental authority.

Participants' emphasis on maintaining consistency in front of children also supports previous findings linking coparenting patterns with children's social-emotional adjustment (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2023). When parents contradict, criticize, or undermine one another in front of children, parenting messages may become inconsistent and interparental conflict may spill over into parent-child interactions. Conversely, coordinated decision-making may provide children with more predictable expectations and reinforce the legitimacy of both parents. The protective role of constructive interparental processes is also evident in research conducted under conditions of acute stress, where stronger interparental functioning mitigated the risk of psychological aggression during the COVID-19 pandemic (Woodward et al., 2026). Thus, the present findings support the view that communication is both an operational mechanism for coordinating tasks and a relational mechanism for protecting the parental alliance.

Perceived fairness and flexible division of labor emerged as the third major determinant. A particularly important finding was that participants did not define fairness as an exact 50-50 division of every task. Rather, fairness was described as proportionality, responsiveness, and recognition of each partner's circumstances. Temporary imbalances were generally accepted when they were understood as necessary, reciprocated over time, and openly acknowledged. This finding adds nuance to the literature on division of parental labor by suggesting that subjective fairness may be more important than numerical equality. Prior research has shown that families use different strategies to divide parenting responsibilities and that coparenting quality and parental involvement are closely intertwined (DeMartini & Hazen, 2023). The current results indicate that flexible redistribution may be especially adaptive in dual-earner families because work demands are rarely stable across time.

This finding also aligns with evidence that parental emotional exhaustion is affected by both childrearing involvement and the availability of supportive relationships (Balenzano et al., 2025). When one partner carries a disproportionate caregiving burden without recognition or compensation, emotional exhaustion and resentment may increase. By contrast, flexibility can protect the relationship when both partners perceive the arrangement as legitimate and temporary. The finding is also consistent with studies of domestic outsourcing, which show that reducing practical

workload does not automatically improve marital relations because the meaning and negotiation of domestic responsibilities remain important (Cheung & Lui, 2023). Thus, simply redistributing tasks to external helpers may not resolve coparenting strain if one partner continues to bear the mental burden of planning, monitoring, and coordinating family life.

The fourth theme, emotional support and recognition of the partner, further demonstrates that effective coparenting is not reducible to task performance. Participants consistently described empathy, appreciation, and acknowledgment as important in sustaining cooperation. Practical imbalance was more tolerable when the partner recognized the effort involved, whereas lack of appreciation intensified perceptions of unfairness. This finding is consistent with research showing that coparenting can moderate associations between parental emotion regulation and parenting self-efficacy (Calabrese & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2023). A supportive coparenting relationship may provide emotional resources that help parents maintain confidence and regulate stress during difficult periods. Similarly, research has shown that father involvement may reduce maternal stress partly through the mediating role of coparenting (d'Orsi et al., 2023). These findings support the interpretation that practical involvement becomes especially beneficial when it occurs within a relationship characterized by emotional recognition and support.

The present results also suggest that emotional support protects against processes that can destabilize coparenting, including jealousy, insecurity, and gatekeeping. Previous studies have linked adult attachment and jealousy of the partner-infant relationship with maternal gatekeeping during the transition to parenthood (Aytaç-DiCarlo & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2026; Aytaç-DiCarlo & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2023; Olsavsky et al., 2020). Gatekeeping may emerge when one parent doubts the other's competence, feels displaced in the caregiving relationship, or seeks to retain control over parenting. The present findings imply that mutual appreciation and recognition may counteract these dynamics by affirming both partners' legitimacy as parents. This interpretation is compatible with research showing that perceptions of fathers' competence and grandmothers' gatekeeping can influence maternal gatekeeping behavior (Wang & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2021). It also helps explain why participants viewed protection of the other parent's authority as an important feature of effective coparenting.

Work-family boundary management was another central determinant and was particularly salient for participants with

unpredictable schedules, long working hours, or digital work demands. The findings indicate that employment influences coparenting not only through time scarcity but also through predictability, control, and permeability. Flexible and predictable work arrangements enabled advance planning and redistribution of responsibilities, whereas last-minute overtime and constant availability increased the likelihood of reactive coordination. This pattern is consistent with research showing that nonstandard work arrangements are associated with parental distress and that coparenting can moderate the effect of work conditions on parental well-being (Feng & Teti, 2025). It is also supported by findings from the COVID-19 period showing that changes in work arrangements affected father involvement by altering parents' opportunities to participate in childcare (Ni et al., 2023).

The present findings further suggest that work conditions do not determine coparenting quality in a simple or direct manner. Couples with demanding jobs sometimes reported effective coparenting when they possessed strong communication, flexibility, and support, whereas less intensive employment could still generate conflict when responsibilities were poorly coordinated. This reflects broader evidence that parental stress is shaped by interacting family and contextual factors (Schoppe-Sullivan, Nuttall, et al., 2021). The pandemic literature also illustrates this interaction, as parents were required to renegotiate work and caregiving roles under rapidly changing conditions (Childress et al., 2023; Iztayeva, 2021). The current study therefore supports a transactional interpretation in which occupational demands create constraints, but relational processes determine how effectively couples adapt to those constraints.

The sixth theme concerned family and sociocultural support. Extended-family assistance was generally described as beneficial when it reduced overload while preserving the couple's authority and responsibility. This finding is consistent with research on intergenerational coparenting showing that grandparents can influence child development and family functioning through the quality of their coordination with parents (Xu et al., 2024). Studies of mother-grandmother coparenting likewise demonstrate that relationships among caregivers can affect caregiver-child attachment and broader family processes (Tan et al., 2024). At the same time, multigenerational caregiving may introduce tensions when parenting practices or authority are contested (Chen et al., 2024). The present findings similarly suggest that extended-family involvement is not inherently

protective; its effects depend on whether it supports or undermines the parental alliance.

The sociocultural component of this theme is particularly important in the Indonesian context. Participants described traditional gender expectations as a potential source of imbalance, especially when mothers remained implicitly responsible for monitoring children's needs despite also being employed. This finding is compatible with research demonstrating that fathers' caregiving roles can be constrained by social expectations and perceived pressure to conform to particular forms of fatherhood (Favez et al., 2022). It also resonates with qualitative work on marginalized caregivers showing that caregiving labor is shaped by social recognition, family expectations, and unequal distributions of responsibility (Xiao, 2026). These results suggest that effective coparenting requires not only interpersonal negotiation but also active management of cultural scripts concerning who is expected to provide care.

The broader pattern identified in this study also helps explain why coparenting is associated with a wide range of family outcomes. Previous research has linked coparenting with breastfeeding duration among dual-earner parents (Yan et al., 2023), the home food environment and children's body mass index (Ramos et al., 2025), and children's behavioral and socioemotional adjustment (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2023). These associations make sense when coparenting is understood as a coordinating system that affects how consistently parents organize routines, health practices, discipline, emotional support, and caregiving decisions. The present findings therefore reinforce the idea that effective coparenting operates as a cross-cutting family resource with implications that extend beyond the quality of the couple relationship itself.

5. Conclusion

Finally, the findings indicate that coparenting should be conceptualized as an adaptive system rather than a fixed trait. The five coparenting patterns identified in the study—highly coordinated, adaptive but strained, asymmetrical, reactive, and externally supported—show that couples can move between more and less effective forms of coordination depending on changing work, family, and relational conditions. This dynamic interpretation is consistent with longitudinal evidence showing that coparenting and father involvement develop over time (Park et al., 2024), as well as research indicating that parenting stress and relational processes may change in response to intervention and

contextual pressures (Richardson et al., 2021). The present study adds qualitative depth to this literature by showing that couples themselves experience coparenting as a process of continual recalibration. Effective coparenting therefore appears to depend less on maintaining a permanently balanced arrangement than on preserving the relational capacity to renegotiate responsibilities when circumstances change.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study involved a relatively small purposive sample of 24 participants from 12 dual-earner heterosexual couples in Indonesia, and the findings are therefore intended to provide analytical rather than statistical generalization. Couples who agreed to participate may have been more reflective, communicative, or motivated to discuss parenting than those who declined participation. Second, the study relied primarily on self-reported interview data, which may have been influenced by recall bias, social desirability, or participants' efforts to present their family relationships in a favorable manner. Although spouses were interviewed separately, their accounts could not independently verify actual day-to-day parenting behavior. Third, the cross-sectional qualitative design captured participants' experiences at one period in family life and could not directly examine changes in coparenting across developmental transitions, changes in employment, or major family stressors. Finally, the sample included substantial variation in occupational and family circumstances, which strengthened breadth but limited the possibility of examining specific subgroups in depth.

Future studies should examine effective coparenting across larger and more diverse samples and include couples from different socioeconomic groups, geographic regions, cultural communities, family forms, and employment arrangements. Longitudinal qualitative or mixed-method studies would be particularly valuable for investigating how coparenting changes as children grow, work conditions change, or families encounter transitions such as childbirth, school entry, relocation, unemployment, or caregiving for older relatives. Future research could also integrate interviews with observational data, daily diaries, time-use measures, and dyadic quantitative assessments to compare perceived fairness with actual patterns of task distribution and interaction. Greater attention should be given to invisible cognitive and emotional labor, including planning,

remembering, monitoring, and anticipating children's needs. Studies involving grandparents, childcare providers, and employers could also provide a more systemic understanding of how external actors facilitate or disrupt coparenting among dual-earner couples.

The findings suggest that family interventions for dual-earner couples should focus on strengthening the parental alliance rather than concentrating exclusively on individual parenting skills. Programs should help couples develop proactive communication routines, clarify shared responsibility, identify invisible parenting labor, negotiate flexible task arrangements, and distinguish equality from perceived fairness. Couple-based interventions may also benefit from teaching strategies for acknowledging each partner's effort, managing disagreement without undermining parental authority, and renegotiating responsibilities during periods of occupational strain. Employers can contribute by increasing schedule predictability, reasonable flexibility, parental leave access, and respect for family boundaries outside working hours. Where grandparents or other caregivers are regularly involved, families may benefit from explicit discussion of decision-making authority, boundaries, and expectations so that external support complements rather than replaces the coparenting relationship. In practice, effective coparenting should be treated as a dynamic capacity that can be strengthened through communication, flexibility, recognition, and coordinated support across family and workplace systems.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have equally contributed to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

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