




Ranking Family Role Models Shaping Adolescent Decision-Making

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Soares Vaneli, G., Daun Crudo, M., & Del Croce, P. (2025). Ranking Family Role Models Shaping Adolescent Decision-Making. *Journal of Psychosociological Research in Family and Culture*, 3(4), 1-13.

<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jprfc.5323>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to identify and rank the most influential family role models that shape adolescents' decision-making processes through an integrated qualitative–quantitative research approach.

Methods and Materials: The research employed a sequential mixed-method design. In the first phase, a qualitative literature-based analysis was conducted until theoretical saturation was achieved. Using NVivo 14, eight major themes were identified, representing the primary family role models influencing adolescents' decision-making: parental modeling, sibling influence, grandparental wisdom, extended family role models, parental communication style, family values and beliefs, family decision climate, and socioeconomic context. In the second phase, a quantitative ranking survey was administered to 200 adolescents in Italy, who evaluated the importance of each theme using a 5-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed with SPSS 26 using descriptive statistics, Friedman's test, and Kendall's W to assess agreement among participants.

Findings: The analysis revealed significant differences among the ranked family role model themes ($p < 0.001$). Parental modeling received the highest mean score ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 0.41$), followed by parental communication style ($M = 4.58$) and family values and beliefs ($M = 4.39$). Socioeconomic and environmental context ranked lowest ($M = 3.48$). Kendall's W coefficient of 0.84 indicated a high level of consensus among participants regarding the hierarchy of family influences.

Conclusion: The study concludes that family influence on adolescent decision-making is primarily shaped by direct behavioral and emotional modeling within supportive, communicative, and value-oriented households. Strengthening family dynamics through targeted mentoring and communication-focused interventions may enhance adolescents' decision-making competence and moral reasoning.

Keywords: Adolescent decision-making; parental modeling; family role models; communication style; family values

1 Introduction

Adolescence is a pivotal developmental stage characterized by exploration, identity formation, and increasing autonomy in decision-making. During this period, adolescents navigate complex social, emotional, and moral challenges that shape their future trajectories. Family systems serve as the foundational socializing environment where adolescents internalize behavioral norms, decision-making frameworks, and emotional regulation strategies (Azh et al., 2020). The influence of family members—whether parents, siblings, grandparents, or extended kin—extends beyond direct supervision to the modeling of values, beliefs, and attitudes that shape adolescents' reasoning and self-regulation (Fransiska Anita Ekawati Rahayu et al., 2023). The family's role is particularly critical as adolescents face competing influences from peers, media, and broader sociocultural forces (Junaid et al., 2025). Understanding how family role models shape adolescents' decision-making processes is thus vital for developing supportive interventions and educational programs that promote adaptive, responsible choices.

Parental influence represents one of the most extensively studied aspects of adolescent development. Parents act as both behavioral exemplars and emotional regulators, transmitting values through both deliberate instruction and implicit modeling (Atif et al., 2022). Research demonstrates that adolescents who perceive strong parental engagement and warmth exhibit greater self-control and moral reasoning when faced with difficult decisions (Dou et al., 2022). The quality of parental communication—whether democratic, authoritarian, or neglectful—further determines the degree of autonomy adolescents experience in decision-making (Bahar et al., 2024). Parental modeling not only guides the types of decisions adolescents make but also influences their perceived competence and emotional resilience in decision contexts (Billingsley et al., 2021).

The nature of family functioning significantly moderates how adolescents respond to external pressures such as peer influence, risk-taking opportunities, and academic stress. Studies indicate that supportive family structures enhance adolescents' capacity to resist maladaptive peer pressures and engage in rational deliberation (Junaid et al., 2025). Conversely, dysfunctional or inconsistent family environments have been associated with higher tendencies toward impulsivity, risky behavior, and poor judgment (Tian, 2024). The interplay between family communication, attachment security, and cognitive control mechanisms

forms the basis of adolescents' decision-making competence (Sulimani-Aidan et al., 2020). Secure family attachment fosters the confidence required to assert independent decisions while maintaining moral alignment with family values (Gunlicks-Stoessel et al., 2025).

Siblings and extended family members also contribute to adolescents' decision-making development. Older siblings often act as mentors, providing experiential knowledge, while cousins and relatives expand adolescents' social learning opportunities (Carolo et al., 2023). Within multigenerational families, grandparents reinforce cultural continuity through storytelling, moral guidance, and intergenerational wisdom (Sari, 2024). Such intergenerational exchanges enhance adolescents' understanding of social norms and facilitate perspective-taking, both essential for mature decision-making (Kholifah et al., 2022). In contexts of family disruption or socioeconomic instability, alternative role models such as aunts, uncles, or mentors may compensate for parental unavailability, ensuring continuity in moral and emotional guidance (Dove, 2022).

The mentorship dynamic, both within and beyond family structures, has received increasing scholarly attention. Natural mentors—defined as trusted adults providing informal guidance—have been shown to positively impact academic performance, emotional well-being, and social adjustment (Dam & Schwartz, 2020). Family-based mentorship, wherein caregivers or relatives serve as informal mentors, strengthens adolescents' resilience against stress and enhances moral decision-making (Charity-Parker et al., 2023). These relationships offer protective functions against social risks, including substance abuse, early sexual initiation, and antisocial behaviors (Vengurlekar et al., 2022). The mentorship model reflects the importance of consistent, emotionally attuned relationships that guide adolescents through decision-making complexity, reinforcing the family's central socializing role (Dam et al., 2021).

The family's moral and cultural orientation also plays an integral role in shaping adolescents' evaluative frameworks. Families act as moral ecosystems where norms, ethics, and cultural identities are transmitted through everyday practices and rituals (Bishop, 2022). Adolescents who internalize strong familial values demonstrate higher self-regulation and lower susceptibility to deviant behavior (Fryt et al., 2021). Cultural expectations influence not only what decisions adolescents make but also how they perceive right and wrong, success and failure, and autonomy and

conformity (Wilhelm et al., 2021). For instance, collectivist family cultures prioritize relational harmony and respect for authority, guiding adolescents toward socially approved decisions (Tschorn et al., 2021), whereas individualistic orientations emphasize self-determination and personal achievement (Rice & Sher, 2021). Both orientations shape the moral reasoning processes that underlie adolescents' choices.

Economic and environmental factors further contextualize family influence. Socioeconomic status affects the degree of exposure adolescents have to risk-taking opportunities and the development of self-control mechanisms (Jia et al., 2021). Adolescents from economically stable families are often socialized into long-term planning and delayed gratification, while those from disadvantaged backgrounds may prioritize immediate rewards due to economic uncertainty (Gorina et al., 2022). The physical and social environments—such as neighborhood safety, educational access, and community norms—mediate how family guidance translates into actual decision outcomes (Park et al., 2024). Families living in cohesive communities provide adolescents with stronger support systems, reducing exposure to deviant subcultures (Schnettler & Steinbach, 2022).

Parental supervision remains a significant predictor of adolescents' decision quality. Longitudinal research shows that poor parental monitoring correlates with impulsivity and higher engagement in risk behaviors (Dou et al., 2022). Conversely, balanced supervision—where autonomy is encouraged alongside guidance—enhances self-regulation and reflective thinking (Young, 2020). The balance between control and freedom allows adolescents to experiment with decision-making within safe boundaries (Harder et al., 2021). Moreover, parents who engage in open discussions about consequences foster adolescents' ability to anticipate risks and make reasoned judgments (Bahar et al., 2024).

In contemporary settings, family structures and decision-making dynamics are also shaped by globalization, media exposure, and technology. Adolescents are now exposed to diverse role models through social media and entertainment platforms, which can either reinforce or conflict with familial norms (Wati, 2025). Families that establish reflective dialogue around digital influences—rather than imposing restrictive controls—enable adolescents to critically evaluate online content and align their choices with ethical reasoning (Maepa & Ntshalintshali, 2020). Digital family interactions, such as co-viewing or shared online

activities, can serve as modern extensions of traditional mentoring and supervision practices (Tian, 2024).

The family's emotional climate—characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and empathy—plays an essential role in adolescents' decision-making under emotional stress. Studies suggest that emotionally supportive families buffer the psychological impact of anxiety, peer rejection, and academic pressure (Park et al., 2024). Family-based emotional validation strengthens adolescents' self-efficacy, enabling them to manage emotions effectively during decision conflicts (Gunlicks-Stoessel et al., 2025). Conversely, emotionally neglectful families foster insecurity and reactive decision patterns driven by short-term emotional relief rather than long-term goals (Azh et al., 2020).

Mentoring interventions have been proposed as a practical means to strengthen family decision-making influence in at-risk populations (Gorina et al., 2022). Programs emphasizing natural mentoring and family empowerment enhance adolescents' ability to manage stress and make health-promoting decisions (Kholifah et al., 2022). Similarly, family strengthening initiatives such as those implemented in child welfare and community health contexts have shown positive outcomes in decision competence and risk avoidance (Sari, 2024). These interventions underline the principle that nurturing relationships—whether parental, sibling, or community-based—provide the scaffolding necessary for adolescents to internalize ethical decision-making processes (Carolo et al., 2023).

Family role models also intersect with mental health outcomes. Supportive familial mentorship correlates with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders (Gunlicks-Stoessel et al., 2025). Conversely, fragmented families or those with inconsistent communication patterns are linked to emotional dysregulation and impulsive decision-making (Dove, 2022). Family involvement in mentoring relationships has been particularly effective in preventing maladaptive coping behaviors, such as substance use and delinquency (Vengurlekar et al., 2022). Moreover, the family's response to adversity, including crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrates how adaptive family systems can foster resilience and prosocial decision-making even under stress (Dam et al., 2021).

The integration of mentoring within family contexts bridges formal and informal support systems, aligning structured guidance with natural relational dynamics (Dam & Schwartz, 2020). Such integration ensures that

adolescents receive continuous feedback on moral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of decision-making. Research has found that adolescents with access to multiple role models—both within and outside the family—exhibit higher decision quality and reduced behavioral risks (Atif et al., 2022). The family thus operates as both a social control system and a developmental catalyst, shaping not only the outcomes of decisions but also the cognitive processes underlying them (Fryt et al., 2021).

Cultural variation plays an important role in determining how family role models are expressed and perceived. In collectivist cultures, family members often act as co-decision-makers, guiding adolescents toward choices that align with group harmony and interdependence (Bahar et al., 2024). In contrast, individualistic settings prioritize personal agency, encouraging critical thinking and independence in decision-making (Rice & Sher, 2021). Both paradigms reveal that family role modeling operates within sociocultural frameworks that define moral legitimacy and expected behavior. Hence, understanding family influence requires considering contextual and cultural variables that mediate value transmission and decision orientation (Wilhelm et al., 2021).

Lastly, contemporary research highlights that strengthening the role of family in adolescent decision-making requires a holistic understanding of both relational and structural factors. Families function as dynamic ecosystems influenced by economic stability, social policies, and educational opportunities (Gorina et al., 2022). Empowering families through community engagement and mentoring initiatives ensures adolescents develop the skills and moral compass necessary for adaptive decision-making in complex social environments (Schnettler & Steinbach, 2022). By integrating findings from developmental psychology, family studies, and social mentoring research, a comprehensive understanding emerges of how family role models shape adolescents' cognitive, emotional, and moral frameworks.

The aim of this study is to identify and rank the most influential family role models that shape adolescent decision-making.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Participants

This study adopted a mixed-method design composed of two sequential phases: a qualitative phase and a quantitative ranking phase. The qualitative phase was exploratory in

nature and aimed to identify key family role models that influence adolescent decision-making. The data collection in this phase relied exclusively on an extensive literature review of national and international scholarly sources until theoretical saturation was reached. The review included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, dissertations, and reports addressing family dynamics, social learning, and adolescent cognitive-emotional development. The findings from this phase served as the theoretical foundation for developing a ranking instrument.

In the second phase, a quantitative design was implemented to prioritize the identified family role model categories based on their perceived importance in shaping adolescent decision-making. The sample consisted of 200 Italian participants, including both male and female adolescents aged 13–18 years, selected through stratified random sampling from secondary schools in Northern and Central Italy. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from both participants and their parents or guardians. The inclusion criteria required participants to be enrolled in secondary education and living with at least one parent or guardian.

2.2 Measures

In the qualitative phase, data were collected through a systematic and integrative literature review, employing a narrative synthesis approach. The review process involved searching academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar using keywords such as “family role models,” “parental influence,” “adolescent decision-making,” “social learning,” and “family socialization.” The retrieved studies were analyzed until theoretical saturation—defined as the point where no new relevant themes or patterns emerged—was achieved.

For the quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire was designed based on the categories and subthemes derived from the qualitative analysis. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items assessing the perceived influence of various family role models (e.g., parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family members, and family friends) on decision-making in domains such as education, relationships, lifestyle, and morality. The survey was distributed both online and in paper format to the 200 participants. Demographic information such as age, gender, family structure, and socioeconomic status was also collected to ensure contextual understanding.

2.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained from the literature review were processed and coded using NVivo 14 software. This phase involved a three-stage coding process: open coding to extract initial concepts, axial coding to identify relationships among codes, and selective coding to integrate these into coherent themes and categories. The process led to the development of a conceptual framework outlining key family role model typologies influencing adolescent decision-making.

In the quantitative ranking phase, the collected survey data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to identify central tendencies and variability in the ranking of family role models. Additionally, Friedman’s test and Kendall’s W coefficient were employed to determine the degree of agreement among participants regarding the relative importance of different family role models. The results were presented in order of rank, providing a data-

driven hierarchy of family influence on adolescent decision-making.

3 Findings and Results

The qualitative phase of the study aimed to identify, conceptualize, and categorize the main family role models that shape adolescent decision-making patterns. Through an extensive literature review, a broad range of psychological, sociological, and educational studies were analyzed to extract recurring themes and behavioral mechanisms underlying family influence. Using NVivo 14, open, axial, and selective coding were performed until theoretical saturation was achieved. The analysis resulted in eight overarching themes representing the most influential family role models and processes. Each theme contained several subthemes and related open codes (concepts) that describe the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of family influence on adolescents’ decision-making.

Table 1

Thematic Structure of Family Role Models Shaping Adolescent Decision-Making

Main Categories (Themes)	Subcategories	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Parental Modeling	1.1 Behavioral imitation	Observing parental actions; adopting family habits; copying parental decision patterns; modeling work ethics
	1.2 Emotional regulation patterns	Parents’ emotional expression; conflict resolution style; emotional modeling; self-control demonstration
	1.3 Moral and ethical guidance	Parental honesty; fairness in discipline; ethical discussions; value reinforcement
2. Sibling Influence	2.1 Peer-like guidance	Advice from older siblings; shared experiences; emulation in social behavior
	2.2 Competition and comparison	Achievement rivalry; identity differentiation; emotional tension management
	2.3 Support and protection	Emotional reassurance; conflict mediation; shared problem-solving
3. Grandparental Wisdom	3.1 Intergenerational values	Storytelling traditions; transmission of family history; moral teachings
	3.2 Emotional security	Unconditional support; soothing presence; attachment stability
4. Extended Family Role Models	4.1 Uncles and aunts as mentors	Role diversity; alternative viewpoints; boundary-setting influence
	4.2 Cousins and peer bonding	Social learning within family; joint activities; influence on leisure choices
	4.3 Family network exposure	Shared norms; kinship-based advice; family role observation
5. Parental Communication Style	5.1 Democratic dialogue	Open communication; mutual respect; joint decision-making; active listening
	5.2 Authoritarian approach	One-way instruction; emotional distance; obedience-oriented control
	5.3 Emotional responsiveness	Warmth in tone; empathic reactions; acknowledgment of adolescent feelings
	5.4 Conflict negotiation	Constructive argumentation; emotional repair; compromise modeling
6. Family Values and Beliefs	6.1 Religious orientation	Spiritual discussions; moral authority; community integration
	6.2 Cultural identity	Preservation of heritage; ethnic pride; traditional gender norms
	6.3 Educational expectations	Emphasis on learning; parental aspiration transmission; academic motivation
7. Family Decision Climate	7.1 Shared decision-making	Family councils; negotiation of household rules; inclusion in choices
	7.2 Risk and autonomy balance	Freedom to choose; parental supervision; evaluation of consequences
	7.3 Modeling responsibility	Accountability teaching; modeling delayed gratification; planning ahead
	7.4 Emotional support during decisions	Encouragement; reassurance during failure; emotional scaffolding
8. Socioeconomic and Environmental Context	8.1 Economic stability and exposure	Parental occupation modeling; financial literacy teaching; social class influence

8.2 Community and peer interface	Neighborhood values; comparison with peers; community reputation
8.3 Media and technology mediation	Digital role models; family discussions about media; online decision examples
8.4 Educational environment	School–family communication; parental involvement in academics; teacher–parent expectations

Theme 1: Parental Modeling

Parental modeling emerged as one of the most significant influences on adolescent decision-making. The literature consistently highlights how children internalize behavioral patterns, emotional regulation strategies, and moral reasoning by observing their parents’ actions and interactions. Through daily observation, adolescents learn to emulate parental habits, replicate decision-making approaches, and interpret emotional cues in social contexts. Parents’ ability to demonstrate honesty, fairness, and consistency serves as a moral compass, shaping adolescents’ ethical judgment and conflict resolution style. Moreover, when parents manage stress constructively and show self-control in challenging situations, adolescents often adopt similar strategies in their own decision-making processes. Thus, parents serve not only as caregivers but also as primary behavioral and emotional role models guiding the cognitive foundation of decision-making.

Theme 2: Sibling Influence

Siblings represent a unique blend of companionship, rivalry, and mentorship within family systems. The qualitative synthesis revealed that older siblings often act as informal advisors, sharing experiential guidance and helping younger siblings navigate social and academic challenges. At the same time, sibling relationships introduce elements of competition and comparison, which can foster achievement motivation and differentiation in identity formation. The protective and supportive aspects of sibling interactions also contribute to emotional development, as siblings frequently serve as mediators in family conflicts and co-problem solvers in daily life situations. Overall, siblings’ influence extends beyond emotional comfort—they act as accessible, relatable figures shaping adolescents’ confidence and social decision-making.

Theme 3: Grandparental Wisdom

Grandparents play a distinct role in transmitting intergenerational wisdom, stability, and emotional security. The analysis found that grandparents often provide moral teachings through storytelling, sharing life experiences, and reinforcing cultural values. Their influence is typically characterized by warmth, patience, and a sense of unconditional acceptance, which helps adolescents feel grounded during critical developmental transitions.

Grandparental relationships often balance parental authority by offering adolescents an empathetic, less judgmental space to reflect on their choices. The intergenerational connection thus becomes a source of both guidance and emotional reassurance, helping adolescents contextualize their decisions within a broader historical and moral framework.

Theme 4: Extended Family Role Models

Beyond the nuclear family, extended relatives such as uncles, aunts, and cousins serve as complementary role models in shaping adolescents’ worldviews. These family members often introduce alternative perspectives and behavioral patterns that diversify adolescents’ understanding of social norms. Uncles and aunts may provide mentorship, career advice, or moral guidance, while cousins serve as near-peer figures influencing social activities, leisure preferences, and lifestyle decisions. Furthermore, the collective influence of the extended family network fosters belonging and social comparison within kinship structures. Adolescents exposed to cohesive and supportive extended families often develop stronger decision-making confidence and social adaptability due to the variety of interpersonal interactions they experience.

Theme 5: Parental Communication Style

Communication style within the family emerged as a central mechanism through which parental influence operates. Democratic and open dialogue patterns promote trust and encourage adolescents to express opinions, negotiate rules, and participate in shared decision-making. In contrast, authoritarian communication styles often inhibit autonomy, leading to compliance without internalized understanding. Emotional responsiveness—marked by empathy, validation, and warmth—strengthens the parent–child bond, while constructive conflict negotiation teaches adolescents to manage disagreements rationally. When parents consistently model transparent communication and emotional regulation, adolescents tend to develop higher decision-making competence, moral reasoning, and interpersonal effectiveness. Thus, communication style mediates the translation of family values into adolescent cognitive and emotional maturity.

Theme 6: Family Values and Beliefs

Family values and belief systems form the ideological foundation of adolescents’ decision frameworks. The

qualitative findings emphasize that religious orientation, cultural identity, and educational expectations deeply influence how adolescents evaluate moral and social choices. Religious discussions within the family reinforce moral accountability and community integration, while cultural identity fosters pride and a sense of belonging. Parental emphasis on education instills achievement motivation and the importance of long-term planning. These shared values collectively act as cognitive scripts guiding adolescents' interpretation of ethical dilemmas, academic goals, and interpersonal behavior. The alignment between family beliefs and adolescents' personal goals enhances coherence and decisional stability, contributing to moral integrity and resilience.

Theme 7: Family Decision Climate

The decision-making climate within the family environment reflects the balance between autonomy, supervision, and collaboration. Families that encourage shared decision-making create opportunities for adolescents to practice independent judgment within a supportive framework. When parents model responsibility and accountability—such as explaining consequences and discussing risks—adolescents learn to evaluate alternatives critically. Emotional support during decision processes further bolsters self-efficacy, reducing anxiety about making mistakes. The presence of a trusting and respectful family decision climate enables adolescents to internalize decision-making competence, transitioning from parental dependence to self-directed reasoning. Such an environment nurtures confidence, foresight, and problem-solving capacity in adolescents' life choices.

Theme 8: Socioeconomic and Environmental Context

The broader socioeconomic and environmental context shapes the backdrop against which family role modeling occurs. Economic stability provides adolescents with exposure to responsible financial behaviors and future-oriented planning, while instability may foster resilience and adaptive problem-solving. Community values, peer influences, and school environments further interact with family dynamics to mold decision-making tendencies. In modern families, media and digital platforms serve as additional modeling agents, with parents and children often negotiating appropriate online behaviors and decision boundaries. The synthesis underscores that family influence does not operate in isolation but within an ecological system of economic, social, and cultural interactions that continuously shape adolescents' choices, aspirations, and moral orientations.

The second phase of this study aimed to quantify and rank the relative importance of the family role model themes identified in the qualitative stage. Based on the eight categories and their subdimensions, a structured questionnaire was developed and distributed to 200 adolescents in Italy. Participants rated each theme using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = "least influential" to 5 = "most influential") regarding how much each family role model influenced their decision-making across domains such as academics, peer relationships, lifestyle, and personal values. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were computed to determine the strength of each category's perceived influence. Additionally, Friedman's test was used to rank the categories, and Kendall's W coefficient was calculated to assess the level of consensus among participants.

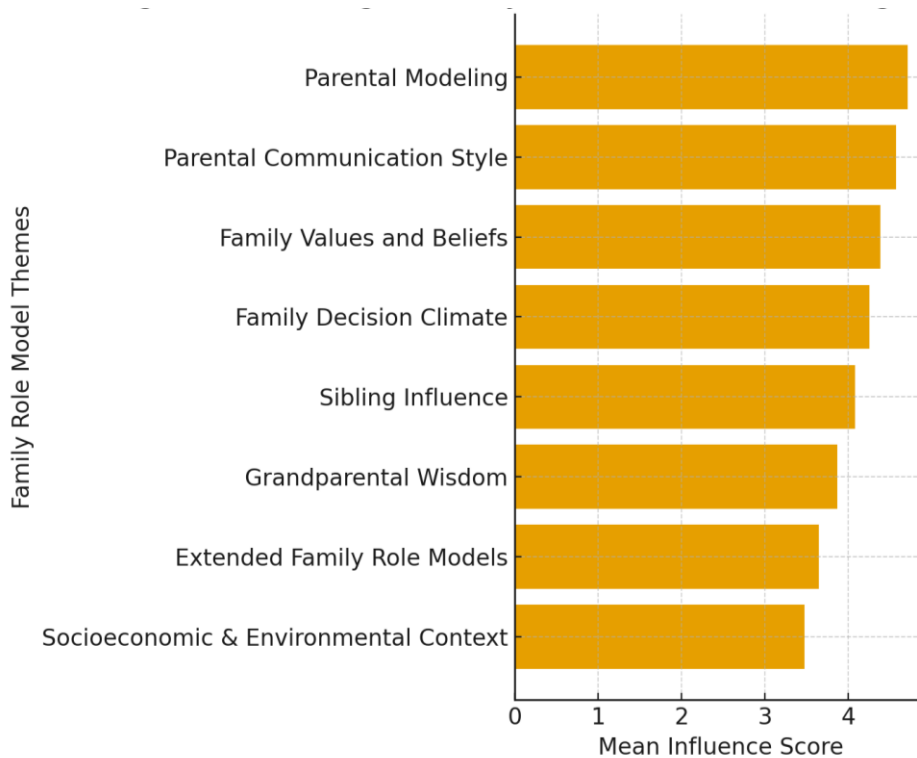
Table 2

Ranking of Family Role Models Shaping Adolescent Decision-Making

Rank	Family Role Model Theme	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (SD)	Relative Weight (%)
1	Parental Modeling	4.72	0.41	18.7
2	Parental Communication Style	4.58	0.46	17.5
3	Family Values and Beliefs	4.39	0.49	16.2
4	Family Decision Climate	4.26	0.53	15.3
5	Sibling Influence	4.09	0.56	14.1
6	Grandparental Wisdom	3.87	0.60	13.3
7	Extended Family Role Models	3.65	0.63	12.0
8	Socioeconomic and Environmental Context	3.48	0.67	11.0

Figure 1

Ranking of Family Role Models Influencing Adolescent Decision-Making



The ranking results demonstrate that parental modeling holds the strongest influence on adolescent decision-making, with the highest mean score (4.72) and relative weight (18.7%). This suggests that adolescents are primarily shaped by their parents’ behavioral, emotional, and moral examples in daily life. Parental communication style ranked second (M = 4.58), emphasizing the importance of open dialogue, emotional responsiveness, and conflict negotiation in supporting adolescents’ reasoning and independence. Family values and beliefs followed closely (M = 4.39), showing that cultural, religious, and educational expectations significantly contribute to moral and cognitive orientations. The family decision climate also scored highly (M = 4.26), indicating that participatory and supportive family environments enhance adolescents’ self-confidence and decision-making skills.

Mid-level influences included sibling influence (M = 4.09) and grandparental wisdom (M = 3.87), revealing that peers within the family and intergenerational mentors provide complementary guidance. In contrast, extended family role models (M = 3.65) and socioeconomic/environmental context (M = 3.48) were perceived as less influential, though still meaningful in shaping values and exposure to external norms. The

Friedman test confirmed statistically significant differences across themes ($p < 0.001$), while Kendall’s $W = 0.84$ indicated a strong level of agreement among the 200 participants regarding the hierarchy of family influences. Overall, the results affirm that immediate parental behaviors and communication practices remain the most critical determinants of how adolescents approach decision-making, overshadowing more distant social or environmental factors.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to identify and rank the key family role models shaping adolescent decision-making through a mixed-method design that integrated qualitative thematic exploration and quantitative prioritization. The findings revealed eight major family-related themes influencing adolescents’ decision-making patterns: parental modeling, parental communication style, family values and beliefs, family decision climate, sibling influence, grandparental wisdom, extended family role models, and socioeconomic and environmental context. Among these, parental modeling emerged as the most influential, followed by communication style, shared family values, and family decision climate. These findings underscore that

adolescents' decision-making competencies are largely shaped within the immediate family context through modeling, communication, and moral transmission rather than by distal or structural influences.

The dominance of parental modeling as the most critical factor aligns with extensive empirical evidence demonstrating that adolescents internalize behavioral, emotional, and moral standards primarily through observation of parental behavior. Parental modeling serves as a blueprint for decision-making processes—teaching adolescents how to evaluate options, anticipate outcomes, and manage moral conflicts (Atif et al., 2022). The current results corroborate findings that strong parental engagement and consistent behavioral examples promote greater adolescent self-control, moral reasoning, and risk awareness (Dou et al., 2022). In particular, parents who exhibit rational problem-solving and emotional regulation behaviors provide adolescents with concrete frameworks for handling uncertainty and social pressure (Gunlicks-Stoessel et al., 2025). These findings also align with (Billingsley et al., 2021), who observed that family mentorship and parental presence significantly enhance connectedness and resilience in adolescent populations. Similarly, (Azh et al., 2020) found that parenting styles emphasizing warmth and structure reduce adolescents' risk-taking tendencies, reinforcing the protective role of parental example.

The second-ranked factor, parental communication style, was found to shape adolescents' confidence, autonomy, and cognitive clarity during decision-making. Open, democratic communication styles encourage reflection, negotiation, and emotional awareness, enabling adolescents to engage critically with moral and social dilemmas (Bahar et al., 2024). The literature confirms that families fostering open dialogue foster adolescents' capacity to express their viewpoints and make reasoned decisions without fear of punishment or judgment (Charity-Parker et al., 2023). Conversely, authoritarian or emotionally distant communication patterns hinder autonomy and increase susceptibility to external pressures (Sulimani-Aidan et al., 2020). Studies such as (Gunlicks-Stoessel et al., 2025) further emphasize that adolescents who perceive parental empathy and responsiveness are more likely to adopt adaptive decision-making strategies when confronted with stress or moral ambiguity. Therefore, communication style serves not only as a relational mechanism but also as a cognitive scaffold supporting rational decision-making.

The theme of family values and beliefs emerged as a strong determinant of adolescents' moral and social

decisions. Adolescents raised in families emphasizing religious, ethical, or educational values tend to internalize consistent moral principles that guide their daily choices (Fransiska Anita Ekawati Rahayu et al., 2023). Consistent with the findings of (Bishop, 2022), value-oriented family environments cultivate self-discipline and integrity, while cultural identity and moral discussions within families provide adolescents with stable frameworks for evaluating ethical issues. Similarly, (Sari, 2024) found that structured family programs focusing on value transmission improved adolescents' sense of purpose and social responsibility. The current study thus reinforces the view that family belief systems act as cognitive templates through which adolescents interpret right and wrong, shaping their evaluative reasoning across multiple life domains.

The influence of the family decision climate—ranked fourth—highlights the importance of shared decision-making and mutual trust between parents and adolescents. A positive decision climate is characterized by participatory processes in which adolescents are allowed to voice opinions and take partial ownership of choices within guided limits. This structure enables adolescents to practice autonomy under supervision, resulting in improved judgment and accountability (Dam et al., 2021). (Dove, 2022) emphasized that when families involve adolescents in household decisions, they develop greater self-efficacy and emotional intelligence. Similarly, (Vengurlekar et al., 2022) demonstrated that adolescents embedded in supportive family decision climates exhibit lower tendencies toward substance use and higher emotional resilience. The present results confirm that when parents and adolescents engage in cooperative decision-making, the process not only strengthens family cohesion but also facilitates the internalization of rational, empathetic reasoning.

Sibling influence ranked fifth, reflecting its moderate but notable impact on decision-making. Siblings act as role models, confidants, and competitors, providing both mentorship and social comparison opportunities (Carolo et al., 2023). In line with (Charity-Parker et al., 2023), sibling relationships can reinforce familial attachment patterns and shape coping strategies, particularly when parental availability is limited. Moreover, siblings' shared experiences with peers and schools often translate into practical decision-making models that complement parental guidance. While not as dominant as parental influence, sibling relationships still function as accessible learning environments for social-emotional decision-making.

Grandparental wisdom, ranked sixth, revealed the enduring role of intergenerational mentorship in moral and emotional development. Grandparents often provide stability, compassion, and continuity of cultural traditions (Sari, 2024). Their influence becomes particularly salient in families undergoing socioeconomic or emotional stress, where grandparents act as emotional anchors and transmitters of resilience (Kholifah et al., 2022). The findings support previous work indicating that intergenerational relationships help adolescents contextualize their decisions within broader moral and historical frameworks, fostering empathy and patience (Bishop, 2022).

The lower-ranked themes, extended family role models and socioeconomic/environmental context, while less influential, still play meaningful roles in shaping adolescents' broader decision ecology. Extended family members such as uncles, aunts, and cousins diversify adolescents' exposure to values, perspectives, and role behaviors, especially in collectivist cultures where kinship systems remain strong (Young, 2020). This finding is consistent with (Carolo et al., 2023), who observed that extended familial mentorship contributes to the integration of refugee and displaced adolescents through psychosocial stability. On the other hand, the socioeconomic and environmental context—although ranked last—affects the conditions under which familial influence operates. Socioeconomic status, neighborhood safety, and access to education determine the resources available for effective parental modeling and supervision (Jia et al., 2021). As (Park et al., 2024) noted, environmental stressors such as poor housing or unsafe communities can erode family resilience, yet families that maintain cohesive communication and support networks buffer adolescents against these external risks.

The statistical results of the ranking analysis further support the conceptual conclusions. The high Kendall's W value (0.84) indicated strong consensus among Italian participants regarding the hierarchy of influences, suggesting that the structure of family-based role modeling is perceived consistently across adolescents. This aligns with international findings that emphasize the universal function of family as the primary socialization agent, transcending cultural and economic variations (Gorina et al., 2022). Moreover, the current data resonate with the integrative frameworks proposed by (Dam & Schwartz, 2020) and (Harder et al., 2021), who argued that youth-initiated and family-based mentoring approaches effectively enhance

self-regulation, risk evaluation, and moral reasoning capacities in adolescents.

An essential interpretation of these findings concerns the interdependence among family role models rather than their isolated effects. Parental modeling interacts with communication style and family values, forming an integrated system of influence. This interconnectedness reflects the "ecosystem of mentorship" described by (Gorina et al., 2022), where diverse family members collectively scaffold adolescent development. Additionally, the results suggest that decision-making competence is not merely a function of individual cognition but an outcome of consistent relational learning within emotionally secure environments. This finding is supported by (Bahar et al., 2024), who found that multilevel family engagement programs effectively reduced adolescents' risk-taking tendencies in high-risk populations.

The findings also underscore that family influence on adolescent decision-making extends to emotional and mental health outcomes. Adolescents embedded in supportive families demonstrate reduced anxiety, depression, and impulsivity, largely due to strengthened emotional regulation capacities (Gunlicks-Stoessel et al., 2025). In contrast, families with poor communication or inconsistent guidance often foster reactive decision patterns and emotional instability (Dove, 2022). This aligns with (Rice & Sher, 2021), who argued that family emotional climate significantly mediates the relationship between stress exposure and maladaptive decisions, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, mentoring and familial engagement interventions have shown protective effects against adolescent substance use, suicide risk, and academic disengagement (Tschorn et al., 2021; Wilhelm et al., 2021).

Cultural and contextual differences further nuance the interpretation of these results. Italian families, characterized by strong intergenerational bonds and family-centric values, may emphasize relational decision-making more than individual autonomy. The ranking pattern observed mirrors trends in collectivist or family-oriented societies where parental modeling and communication dominate over peer or environmental influences (Schnettler & Steinbach, 2022). However, in more individualistic contexts, such as North America, adolescents may prioritize peer mentorship and independent reasoning earlier in development (Fryt et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the universal principle remains that stable, emotionally engaged family systems serve as the foundation for adaptive decision-making.

Finally, the findings suggest that enhancing adolescents' decision-making should not focus solely on cognitive training or external mentorship but should strengthen family dynamics themselves. Programs that integrate parents as active participants in mentorship and emotional coaching—such as youth-initiated mentoring frameworks—may yield long-term benefits for adolescent development (Dam et al., 2021). Similarly, community-based family strengthening programs, as seen in child protection and health initiatives, demonstrate that empowering families enhances decision competence and prosocial outcomes (Sari, 2024). The present study therefore contributes to a growing consensus that family-centered strategies represent the most effective approach to promoting moral, emotional, and behavioral maturity among adolescents (Atif et al., 2022; Gorina et al., 2022).

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The participant pool was limited to adolescents from Italy, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to cultures with different family structures or value orientations. The ranking method, while informative, captures perceived rather than observed influence, which may be affected by adolescents' subjective interpretations and social desirability bias. The reliance on literature-based qualitative data in the first phase may also limit the depth of lived experiences compared to interviews or focus groups. Furthermore, while NVivo analysis provided conceptual saturation, it cannot fully capture the dynamic, longitudinal nature of family interactions. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences, and future longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to examine how changes in family communication or structure influence decision-making trajectories over time.

Future studies should incorporate cross-cultural comparisons to explore how different sociocultural contexts shape the hierarchy of family influences. Longitudinal designs would help track how parental modeling and communication evolve as adolescents gain autonomy and how these changes affect decision-making quality. Including parents, siblings, and grandparents as co-participants would provide a multidimensional view of family dynamics and enable triangulation of perspectives. Moreover, integrating neurocognitive measures—such as decision-making under uncertainty or risk evaluation tasks—could enrich understanding of the mechanisms linking family modeling to cognitive outcomes. Finally, digital influences and modern family adaptations, such as remote communication

and social media interaction, warrant inclusion in future models to reflect contemporary realities of family influence.

Practically, interventions should focus on strengthening family communication and modeling through psychoeducational programs for parents and adolescents. Schools and community centers can organize workshops to train families in democratic communication, emotional regulation, and joint decision-making. Family counseling programs should integrate mentoring principles to create supportive decision climates within households. Policymakers may also design initiatives that promote intergenerational engagement, encouraging grandparents and extended relatives to contribute to adolescent mentoring. Ultimately, empowering families as active agents in adolescents' cognitive and moral development can foster responsible, resilient decision-makers prepared to navigate complex social challenges.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

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

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethics Considerations

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

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