

## Tight-Loose Culture as a Predictor of Family Communication Patterns

Rizky Vania Sapphira, Afifah At Thohiroh, Mutia Aulia Dewi, Nabilah Maghfirah Maulani,  
Thalia Latifah, Gunisya Kartika Sari, Rizka Halida, Mirra Noor Milla

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rizky Vania Sapphira, Kampus Baru Universitas Indonesia, Depok, Jawa Barat 16404, Indonesia.  
Email: [vaniasarizky@gmail.com](mailto:vaniasarizky@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Culture is one aspect that can influence family communication patterns. Based on previous research, limited studies still focus on discussing the influence of tight-loose culture on family communication patterns, especially on the orientation of conversation and conformity. This research examines the role of the tight-loose culture in predicting family communication patterns. Through hierarchical regression analysis conducted on 281 participants with an age range of 18–40 years ( $M = 24.23$ ,  $SD = 5.47$ ), this research partially supports the proposed hypothesis, in which tight-loose culture only predicts conformity-oriented communication patterns ( $F[6, 274] = 5.794$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = .093$ ) after controlling for demographic factors. Results also showed that gender predicted conversation and conformity orientations, while age predicted only conformity orientation. Through this study, it can be concluded that culture plays a significant role in shaping family communication patterns, particularly in Indonesia, where family communication tends to be characterized by consensus. Therefore, tightness culture is significant in influencing conformity orientation. However, further elaboration is needed on the factors that influence conversation orientation. This study also includes a discussion of the implications and limitations of the findings.

### Abstrak

Budaya merupakan salah satu aspek yang dapat memengaruhi pola komunikasi keluarga. Penelitian terdahulu yang telah dilakukan masih terbatas pada pembahasan pengaruh budaya *tight-loose* terhadap pola komunikasi keluarga, khususnya pada orientasi percakapan dan konformitas. Penelitian ini mengkaji peran budaya *tight-loose* dalam memprediksi pola komunikasi keluarga. Melalui analisis regresi bertingkat yang dilakukan pada 281 partisipan dengan rentang usia 18–40 tahun ( $M = 24,23$ ;  $SD = 5,47$ ), penelitian ini mendukung sebagian hipotesis, yaitu bahwa budaya *tight-loose* hanya memprediksi pola komunikasi berorientasi konformitas ( $F[6, 274] = 5,794$ ;  $p < 0,01$ ;  $R^2 = 0,093$ ) setelah mengendalikan faktor demografi. Hasil penelitian juga menunjukkan bahwa jenis kelamin memprediksi orientasi percakapan dan konformitas, sedangkan usia hanya memprediksi orientasi konformitas. Melalui penelitian ini, dapat disimpulkan bahwa budaya memegang peranan penting dalam membentuk pola komunikasi keluarga, khususnya di Indonesia yang cenderung dicirikan oleh komunikasi keluarga yang bersifat konsensus. Oleh karena itu, budaya *tightness* memiliki pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap orientasi konformitas. Namun, diperlukan elaborasi lebih lanjut mengenai faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi orientasi percakapan. Penelitian ini juga mencakup pembahasan mengenai implikasi dan keterbatasan temuan.



## INTRODUCTION

“Everything starts at home”—a common Indonesian proverb that portrays the family as the foundational institution shaping an individual’s behavior. As a primary social system, the family has a significant influence on its members. It is characterized by a shared worldview and internalized systems of values and beliefs that define its role within broader social contexts (Bevan et al., 2021). These values and belief systems have wide-ranging implications for how family members interpret their social environment and communicate within the family unit and in external interactions. Family communication has a substantial impact on the psychological well-being and social functioning of family members, and it affects the quality of familial relationships (Arias & Punyanunt-Carter, 2017; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993).

Recently, news about the role of the family towards troubled children has been widely discussed, especially about the handling of troubled children. The Governor of West Java, as reported by Tempo (Yunus, 2025), stated that there is a trend of declining attention from family members to troubled children, resulting in an inability to care for them. The role of the family is always reflected in the actions of other family members, especially children when they are outside. People often wonder how family communication is formed, whether children are not open to their parents or parents cannot accommodate the communication process in the family. Therefore, communication and culture are interesting things to explore in Indonesia because this country adheres to an Eastern culture that prioritizes norms and customs that reflect the behavior of its people, especially in terms of communication.

Research findings related to intergenerational norms, attitudes, and communication reveal differences in how individuals communicate with older family members, older people outside the family, or peers of the same age (Giles et al., 2003). Moreover, today, rapid technological development and social transformation have created a situation in which people are more easily mobilized in certain Asian countries. This allows for the absorption of new norms and styles of language and speech, potentially leading to communication differences between young adults and their elders. This condition often causes difficulties or conflicts when communicating directly, especially in family contexts with diverse cultures and communication styles (Arias & Punyanunt-Carter, 2017).

Each family tends to cultivate its communication style, shaped by underlying value orientations (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Schrodt et al., 2008). These orientations are grounded in core familial values and beliefs that guide interpersonal interactions (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). The theoretical framework that explicates these orientations is the family communication patterns (FCP) theory, which delineates two primary dimensions: conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Conversation orientation refers to a family communication climate in which members are encouraged to engage in open and diverse discussions. In contrast, a conformity orientation denotes a communication climate that prioritizes homogeneity in attitudes, beliefs, and values among family members.

The existing literature on FCP consistently demonstrates associations between demographic factors. Gender, for instance, has been shown to influence FCP perceptions: male adolescents are more likely to report higher levels of conformity orientation, whereas female adolescents tend to perceive a greater emphasis on conversation orientation (Anderson et al., 2018; Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Shearman & Dumlao, 2008). Structural family variables, such as the number of siblings (Anderson et al., 2018) and parental educational attainment (Bilgici et al., 2018), have also been identified as relevant predictors of FCP. Concerning age, research indicates that as children grow older, parents are more likely to adopt communication patterns that support the expression of individual opinions and perspectives (Scruggs & Schrodt, 2021).

Over time, FCPs have increasingly been examined within cultural frameworks, as their communication styles are shaped by contextual and familial backgrounds. Koerner and Schrodtt (2014) assert that culture inherently influences family communication. This relationship is evident in the contrasting communication patterns observed across collectivist and individualist societies. In collectivist cultures—characterized by high power distance and high-context communication—children are typically expected to demonstrate obedience and deference toward parents (reflecting a dominance of conformity orientation). They are generally less open in communication (Guan & Li, 2017). In contrast, individualist cultures—marked by low power distance and low-context communication—encourage children to express opinions freely and behave assertively toward their parents (indicating a stronger conversation orientation). These distinctions align with findings by (Shearman & Dumlao, 2008), who found that American families scored higher on conversation and conformity orientations than Japanese families.

Cross-cultural investigations of FCP extend beyond the individualism-collectivism and high-context–low-context dichotomies. An alternative cultural dimension, tightness–looseness, focuses on the strength and enforcement of social norms within a society (Gelfand et al., 2011). While this construct is conceptually related to collectivism and individualism, it is theoretically distinct (Carpenter, 2000; Gelfand, et al., 2006, 2011). For example, although many tight cultures tend to be collectivist, a collectivist society can exhibit loose enforcement of norms. Conversely, some individualist cultures may display a high degree of norm rigidity in daily life (Gelfand et al., 2006).

Nevertheless, tightness-looseness, as a cultural construct, remains relatively underexplored in the literature despite the frequency and breadth of norm enforcement within a society, which potentially plays a significant role in shaping how families emphasize rules and regulations, including communication patterns. Given the conceptual connections between cross-cultural frameworks and the limited research linking FCP with tight–loose cultures, this study aims to explore the potential contribution of tightness–looseness to family communication patterns. This study investigates the relationship while accounting for demographic variables that previous studies have consistently associated with FCP, namely gender, age, number of siblings, and parental education level.

Based on this rationale, the central research question emerges: does cultural tightness–looseness predict family communication patterns after controlling for demographic factors such as gender, age, number of siblings, and parental education? The hypothesis proposed in this study posits that tightness–looseness significantly contributes to both conversation and conformity orientations. Specifically, greater cultural tightness will positively predict conformity orientation and negatively predict conversation orientation, even after controlling for the aforementioned demographic variables.

## **METHODS**

The sampling technique in this study was convenience sampling. The number of participants was determined by GPower 3.1 analysis and was targeted at least 89 people. This research uses two instruments. According to the guidelines of Beaton et al. (2000), the instruments were initially adapted for use in the Bahasa language. In the process, the researcher involved a translator to carry out the translation and a psychologist at the expert judgment stage. The adaptation results were tested on 30 participants online using Google Forms. The participants were Indonesian citizens aged 18 to 40 years. On average, participants took 5 to 10 minutes to answer the statements.

The revised family communication pattern (RFCP) scale measures family communication patterns consisting of 26 items (15 items measure the conversation orientation dimension, and 11 items measure the conformity orientation dimension; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Items on the RFCP scale are rated using a 6-point Likert scale, 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*. The results

of the adapted RFCP trial showed that this scale is reliable in measuring family communication patterns ( $\alpha = .97$  for the conversation orientation dimension and  $\alpha = .88$  for the conformity orientation dimension). Researchers use item validity to measure validity by looking at the corrected item-total correlation (CITC) value. The RFCP has a CITC value range of .50 to .89 for the conversation dimension and .43 to .80 for the conformity dimension. This indicates that each RFCP item makes a significant contribution to the scale in measuring family communication patterns, as the range of values is all greater than .30 (Marianti et al., 2023).

The tightness-looseness scale assesses the strength of social norms and the level of tolerance for deviance from those norms within a country (Gelfand et al., 2011). The scale consists of six items. Participants are asked to respond to each item using a 6-point Likert scale, 1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 6 = *Strongly Agree*. The items collectively evaluate the clarity of norms, tolerance for norm violations, and adherence to norms within the context of national culture. Scoring is conducted by summing all item responses, resulting in a total score ranging from 6 to 36. Higher scores indicate a perception of tighter cultural norms within the respondent's national context. The scale has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha = .67$  in its initial validation with a CITC value range of .38 to .69. However, item 4 has the lowest CITC value of .12. The problem of low reliability and validity values on item 4 is also found in the adapted version of other countries, especially with Eastern cultures such as South Korea (Oh, 2022) and China (Liu et al., 2022).

This study included demographic characteristics as predictor variables. Accordingly, the questionnaire collected information on participants' gender (0 = male; 1 = female), age, highest level of education (1 = elementary school; 2 = junior high school; 3 = high school; 4 = diploma; 5 = bachelor's degree; 6 = master's degree; 7 = doctoral degree), and number of siblings. In addition, the questionnaire gathered data on participants' parental background, including the highest level of education for both mother and father (coded using the same scale), as well as parental marital status (1 = married; 2 = divorced; 3 = one parent deceased; 4 = both parents deceased).

The researcher conducted a hierarchical regression analysis to test whether cultural tightness-looseness predicts family communication patterns. Each regression model assessed the predictive power of cultural tightness-looseness on the conversation and conformity dimensions. All statistical analyses were performed using RStudio.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Characteristic

Data was collected over one week in May 2024 through an online questionnaire, resulting in 324 participants. This study had 281 participants after excluding responses that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The sample consisted of 86 males (30.6%) and 195 females (69.4%), aged between 18 and 40 years ( $M = 24.23$ ,  $SD = 5.47$ ). Most participants had completed high school (45.6%). Most reported having two to three siblings (35.2%), with the majority of parents currently married (75.1%). Regarding parental education, most fathers (33.1%) and mothers (35.6%) had completed high school.

The primary predictor variable, cultural tightness-looseness, had a mean score of 26.88 ( $SD = 3.06$ ). For family communication patterns, the conversation orientation had a mean score of 49.38 ( $SD = 12.53$ ). In contrast, the conformity orientation had a mean score of 36.63 ( $SD = 7.18$ ).

Table 1.  
Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max.
Tight-loose Culture	26.88	3.06	6	36
Conversation	49.38	12.53	15	90
Conformity	36.63	7.18	11	66

Based on the table above, the score range for each variable can be determined by using the range and interval between the minimum and maximum scores. For the tight-loose culture variable, the low score ranges from 6 to 16, the medium score ranges from 17 to 26, and the high score ranges from 27 to 36. The higher the score, the more it shows the characteristics of a tight culture. The mean sample is in the high range. So, this research population tends to have a tight culture. Then, the low score range for conversation is 15 to 40, medium 41 to 60, and high 66 to 90. Participants tend to be at a medium level for conversation.

Meanwhile, conformity has a low score range of 11 to 29, a medium score range of 30 to 47, and a high score range of 48 to 66. Participants are also at a medium level. However, when comparing the two mean scores on these orientations, participants rated themselves as having a higher conversation orientation.

#### **Multicollinearity and Normality Test**

The researcher conducted a multicollinearity test to ensure that the predictor variables in each regression model were not strongly correlated. The variance inflation factor (VIF) calculation for models predicting conversation and conformity orientations yielded VIF values ranging from 1.00 to 2.16, which is well below the critical threshold of 10. These results indicate that there is no substantial multicollinearity among the predictors. The researcher also conducted a normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk method. The results showed that the data were not normally distributed ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the analysis proceeded with outlier removal to address this violation of the normality assumption.

#### **Hierarchical Regression Test**

In the first model, demographic variables—gender, age, number of siblings, and parental education—were entered as predictors. The results indicated that only gender significantly predicted conversation orientation,  $b = -.37$ ,  $t = -3.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $F(5, 275) = 3.352$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = .040$ . Male participants were significantly more likely to report lower levels of conversation orientation. The researcher added tight-loose cultural orientation as a predictor in the second model. The results showed that cultural tightness-looseness was not a significant predictor of conversation orientation,  $b = .20$ ,  $t = 1.78$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $F(6, 274) = 3.344$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .048$ . These findings suggest that cultural tightness-looseness does not significantly influence family communication patterns characterized by open discussion and shared viewpoints among family members.

Table 2.  
Result of Hierarchical Regression on Conversation Orientation

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
Model 1					
Constant	3.60*	.28	12.80	.040	
Gender	-.37*	.10	-3.50		
Age	-.01	.01	-1.22		
Number of siblings	.05	.04	1.25		
Father's education	.04	.04	.81		
Mother's education	-.00	.04	-.13		
Model 2					
Constant	2.83*	.51	5.53	.048	.011
Gender	-.36*	.11	-3.40		
Age	-.01	.01	-1.11		
Number of siblings	.05	.04	1.10		
Father's education	.03	.05	.73		
Mother's education	-.01	.05	-.23		
Tight-loose	.20	.10	1.78		

\* $p < .001$

The researcher continued the hierarchical regression analysis to examine the predictive role of cultural tightness-looseness on conformity orientation in family communication. In the first model, demographic variables—gender, age, number of siblings, and parents' education—were included as predictors. The results revealed that both gender ( $b = -.26$ ,  $t = -3.16$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and age ( $b = -.03$ ,  $t = -3.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ) significantly predicted conformity orientation,  $F(5, 275) = 5.314$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .072$ . Specifically, male and younger participants reported significantly higher levels of conformity orientation.

The researcher added a tight-loose cultural orientation as an additional predictor in the second model. The results demonstrated a significant effect of tightness-looseness on conformity orientation ( $b = .20$ ,  $t = 2.75$ ,  $p < .01$ ),  $F(6, 274) = 5.794$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = .093$ . An ANOVA comparison between the two models revealed a significant improvement in shared variance,  $\Delta F(1, 292) = 7.55$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .024$ . This finding indicates that after controlling for gender and age, cultural tightness-looseness contributed an additional 2.4% to the explained variance in conformity orientation.

Table 3.  
Result of Hierarchical Regression on Conformity Orientation

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
Model 1					
Constant	4.19**	.22	19.35	.072	
Gender	-.26*	.08	-3.16		
Age	-.03**	.01	-3.72		
Number of siblings	.03	.03	.79		
Father's education	-.03	.03	-.80		
Mother's education	-.00	.04	.05		

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
Model 2					
Constant	3.29**	.39	8.40	.093	.024
Gender	-.24*	.08	-2.97		
Age	-.02**	.01	-3.57		
Number of siblings	.02	.03	.51		
Father's education	-.03	.04	-.94		
Mother's education	-.00	.04	-.11		
Tight-loose	.20*	.07	2.75		

\**p* < .01; \*\* *p* < .001

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the role of tight-loose cultural orientation in predicting family communication patterns, specifically in terms of conversation and conformity orientations. The statistical analyses revealed that, as hypothesized, cultural tightness significantly and positively predicted conformity orientation. However, the second hypothesis was not supported, suggesting a negative predictive relationship between tightness and conversation orientation. Additionally, in contrast to previous research findings (Anderson et al., 2018; Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Shearman & Dumlao, 2008), male participants in this study reported a higher conformity orientation than female participants. The following section elaborates on these findings.

The significant role of cultural tightness in predicting conformity orientation aligns with findings from Guan and Li (2017), who showed that conformity orientation tends to be stronger in collectivist cultures with high-context communication than in individualist cultures characterized by low-context communication. In high-context cultures, family members communicate less explicitly and rely on shared understandings. Within the Indonesian context, consensual family communication patterns—marked by high conversation and high conformity—are prevalent in rural and urban communities (Rumata, 2017). Although parents engage in two-way dialogues with their children, they generally retain authority in decision-making processes. Furthermore, tight-loose culture also influences how people use language in everyday communication. Research indicates that families in tight-knit cultures often adhere to numerous linguistic norms, such as using honorifics when speaking to older individuals (Thompson & Schrodt, 2015). These norms reflect a structured and rule-bound communication style that reinforces conformity within family interactions.

Contrary to the initial hypothesis, the present study found that cultural tightness-looseness did not significantly predict family conversation orientation. This result suggests that strong social norms in a given culture do not necessarily imply that families within that culture are less open to exchanging ideas and perspectives among members. In other words, other factors may play a more substantial role in shaping the openness of family communication beyond cultural tightness.

One possible explanation for this non-significant finding lies in the characteristics of the study's sample. Most participants were adults, which may have influenced the nature of family communication they experienced. Adult children are generally more involved in reciprocal dialogue with parents, reflecting a more open communication style (Jiao, 2021). Gelfand et al. (2006) emphasized that stricter social rules and limited conversational freedom are more prevalent in parent-child interactions during early developmental stages, such as childhood or adolescence than in interactions with adult offspring.

Another key finding in this study is the consistent role of gender in predicting both conversation and conformity orientations. While the result concerning conformity orientation aligns with previous studies, indicating that male participants are more likely to endorse conformity (Anderson et al., 2018), the result for conversation orientation diverged from earlier findings. Specifically, contrary to prior assumptions that females tend to engage more in open communication, male participants in this study reported higher levels of conversation orientation.

This discrepancy may be understood in light of findings by Punyanunt-Carter et al. (2019), which revealed that male respondents were more likely to perceive their families as consensual. Consensual families, as defined by Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002), exhibit high levels of both conversation and conformity orientations. These families encourage children to voice their opinions while maintaining parental authority in the final decision-making process. This communication model aligns with the pattern observed in the current study, where male participants consistently predicted conversation and conformity orientations more strongly than their female counterparts.

Another demographic factor that significantly predicts conformity orientation is age. The higher the child's age, the lower the conformity orientation. This aligns with the findings of Scruggs and Schrodtt (2021), which suggest that parents with adult children are more comfortable discussing sensitive issues, such as politics, and therefore exhibit a lower conformity orientation. As children grow older, the parent-child communication pattern becomes more open, allowing for a freer exchange of opinions.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that a tight-loose culture explains family communication patterns that are oriented toward shared beliefs, attitudes, and values. This study successfully demonstrated a relationship between tight-loose culture and family communication patterns, an aspect not explored in previous studies, while also demonstrating that several controlled demographic factors play a role in family communication, such as gender differences, which are more flexible in determining communication orientations, and values of conformity and conversation, both of which showed positive relationships with tight-loose culture. Several limitations, including the low reliability of the adapted tight-loose scale used in this study, using only two primary orientations—conversation and conformity—separately and not incorporating all four typologies combined by Fitzpatrick, and participants' cultural backgrounds not being differentiated in specific contexts, support future research to further develop a tight-loose measurement instrument, consider the use of approach-avoidance and avoidance-oriented strategies in delivering communication messages, and involve participants from different cultural backgrounds to more clearly compare tight-loose cultures.

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