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# Table of Contents

<a href="#"><u>Profil Epidémiologique de l'Asthme et de la Bronchopneumopathie Chronique Obstructive au Centre Hospitalier Provincial de Sidi Saïd de Meknès, Maroc</u></a> Ibrahim EL GHAZI, Imane BERNI, Aziza MENOUNI, Marie-Paule KESTEMONT, Mohammed AMANE, Samir EL JAAFARI	01-08
<a href="#"><u>Linguovoculary Properties Of Art Terms (On The Example Of French And Uzbek Languages)</u></a> Gulchehra Hojjeva	09-15
<a href="#"><u>Interpretation Of Navruz In Navoi's Work</u></a> Rajabova Marifat Baqoevna	16-23
<a href="#"><u>Economic Justification, Russia Business Regulation and Risk Management in Russian Companies: Limited Liability Company "SSK"</u></a> Hartomy Akbar Basory, Ni Kadek Sri Widiari Suwitera, Refly Setiawan	24-34
<a href="#"><u>The Validity of the E-Book on Integrated Physics for Earthquake Disaster Mitigation Materials</u></a> Fitrah Ayu, Ahmad Fauzi	35-42
<a href="#"><u>An Analysis of Scientific Literacy of Students of SMPN 4 Tanjung Pinang and of SMPN 6 Tanjung Pinang</u></a> Dea Wahyu Sartika, Yuni Ahda	43-49
<a href="#"><u>Content And Methods Of Individualization Of Teaching Activities</u></a> Alimova Nozima	50-53
<a href="#"><u>Challenges For Increasing Efficiency Of Education</u></a> Turaqulova Dilafruz Qahhorovna, Jabborova Dilafruz Sharofovna	54-59
<a href="#"><u>Damage Of Zoophil And Sinbovil Flies In Livestock And Their Fight Against Them</u></a> Ismoilov A.Sh., D.v.sci. Pfor. A. Ruzimorodov	60-62
<a href="#"><u>Validity of Student Worksheets using Inquiry Based Learning Models with Science Technology Society Approach for Physics Learning</u></a> Vera Yunita Nasution, Rahmi Agustia Widestra, Yulkifli Yulkifli	63-68
<a href="#"><u>Metaphor In The Scientific Discourse</u></a> Abdulhairova Firuza Invarovna	69-73
<a href="#"><u>Mixture Problem For Abstract Policalorical The Equations</u></a> Egamberdiev Olimjon Mamatvalievich, Bunazarov Xusniddin Kamoldinovich	74-79
<a href="#"><u>Find A General Solution Of An Equation Of The Hyperbolic Type With A Second-Order Singular Coefficient And Solve The Cauchy Problem Posed For This Equation.</u></a> Karimova Shalola Musayevna, Melikuzieva Dilshoda Mukhtorjon qizi	80-82
<a href="#"><u>Causes And Consequences Of Floods And Floods In The Safety Of Life, Measures To Protect The Population And The Territory</u></a> Rakhmanov Sharifjon Valijonovich, Turgunov Avazkhon Axmadjanovich, Yuldashev Shakhboz Khoshimjon	83-86
<a href="#"><u>The Impact Of Optimizing The Composition Of Arable Land On The Fruit And Vegetable Complex In The Innovative Development Of Agriculture</u></a> Dadaboev Tulkinjon Yusupjonovich, Saydullaeva Saodat, Nurullaeva Shakhnoza	87-89
<a href="#"><u>A Way To Increase Student Activity In The Organization Of Lectures</u></a> Zokirjon Mahmudov Sotivoldievich	90-92

<a href="#">Digitalization Adoption in Shipping Business Services. Case study: Libya</a>	93-98
Ali Bakeer, Abdulbaset Albaour	
<a href="#">Socio-Psychological Characteristics Of A Modern School Leader And A Program Of Continuous Professional Development</a>	99-103
Ubaydullo Akhrorovich Kasimov, Barotova Nasiba Muzaffarovna	
<a href="#">Toponyms Formed On The Basis Of Nation Names</a>	104-107
Bayramali Ergashovich Kilichev, Maftuna Zoir Qizi Safarova	
<a href="#">Agrotechnology Of Growing Medical Salvia (Salvia Officinalis L.) Seedlings Under The Influence Of Mineral Fertilizers In Tashkent Region</a>	108-111
Ulugova Safargul Fayzullaevna, Ruzmetov Umid Ismailovich	
<a href="#">The Impact of Behavioral Finance on Lebanese Investors' Decision Making</a>	112-127
Pr.Latifa Ghalayini, Sally Ziad Alkees	
<a href="#">EPIZOOTOLOGY Bovicosis (бовиколарининг) OF CATTLE (Қорамол бовиколалари ва уларнинг эпизоотологияси) (Бовикола – Bovicola деб ёзилади)</a>	128-132
F.S. Pulotov, B.F. Sayfiddinov	
<a href="#">The Literary Image Of The Historical Personalia In The Story Of "The Shadow Of The Death" By Temur Qurbon</a>	133-137
Amirkulova Zebuniso Mustafqulovna	
<a href="#">Compliment As One Of The Forms Of Phatic Communication</a>	138-142
Khamroeva Nafisa Nizomiddinovna	
<a href="#">Experimental Test Of Effectiveness Of Electric Courses In Higher Education</a>	143-151
Kadirov R.Kh., Shukurov R.S	
<a href="#">The policies that can be implemented to stop the value of UZB som from falling.</a>	152-155
Toraeva Sayyora Sattorovna	
<a href="#">Problems Of Developing The Most Important Didactic Tool For Activating The Learning Process Of Students In The Educational Process</a>	156-159
Akmal Shavkatovich Aminov, Avaz Ruziboevich Shukurov, Dilfuza Islomovna Mamurova	
<a href="#">Bukhara Registan: Past And Present</a>	160-166
Jurayeva Elvira Elmuradovna	
<a href="#">The Development Of The Tourism Object In Baloli Village, Masamba, North Luwu</a>	167-172
Rusmawaty Rusdin	
<a href="#">An analysis of current scenario of COVID-19 in Malaysia</a>	173-182
Chia Ming Hong, Kah Em Chu	
<a href="#">Water Quality And Benthic Macroinvertebrates Of Tropical Forest Stream In South-West Region, Cameroon</a>	183-192
Samuel FOTO MENBOHAN, Mathias NWAHA, Eric Belmond BIRAM à NGON, Jean DZVI, Rita Cecile BOUDEM, Paul Bertrand SOB NANGOU, Donald-l'or NYAME MBIA	
<a href="#">Morphofunctional indicators of girls involved in athletics</a>	193-197
Lola Mukhammedovna Saidbaeva, Rano Amanullaevna Alieva, Feruza Nasretdinovna Mirzabekova, Sohiba Mamasidikovna Sirojiddinova, Ismoiljon Adakhamzhonovich Mirzabekov, Azizbek Akbarovich Abdullaev	
<a href="#">SCHOOL BIOLOGICAL EDUCATION WITH A FOCUS ON WORLD EXPERIENCE</a>	198-201
Feruza Makhammadovna Topilova, Gulnora Abdurashidovna Kimsanova	

<a href="#">The release of hydrolytic enzymes by the salivary glands and their content in the blood after unilateral nephrectomy</a>	202-205
Zukhra Nasirdinovna Dumaeva, Shokir Kodirovich Kodirov, Muhammadumar Shokirovich Kodirov, Rakhmatillo Shokirovich Kodirov, Gulmira Adilovna Yuldasheva	
<a href="#">Lingua-Cognitive Aspect Of Metaphoric Euphemization</a>	206-209
Dilrabokhon Andurahimovna Rustamova	
<a href="#">Dilemma of Business Climate and The "Real Climate"</a>	210-214
Faradiba Faradiba	
<a href="#">Developing Literacy and Numeracy in Early Childhood Education in Ghana: The Role of Traditional Ewe Play Games</a>	215-226
Sampson L.K Yekple, Innocent Yao Vinyo, Maxwell Seyram Kumah	
<a href="#">Examining The Ravaging (Covid 19) And Its Implications For Educational Institutions On A Global Perspective</a>	227-234
Bright Okanezi, Amadi Mercy Steve	
<a href="#">Influence Of Induction Of The Latent Nuclear Polyhedrosis Virus On Reproductive Characteristics Of The Silkworm Bombyx Mori L.</a>	235-239
Ismatullaeva Diloram Adilovna, Begmatov Toir Mukhtarovich	
<a href="#">A Bus Reservation System On Smartphone</a>	240-250
Ugwu Nnaemeka Virginus, Nelson Ogechukwu Madu, Okafor Loveth Ijeoma, Anusiobi Chinenye Loveline, Ugwuanyi Peace Nkiruka, Ndunelo Paul Tobeckukwu, Ani Chinonso Darlington	
<a href="#">Estimation Of Water Requirement Of Lycopersicon Esculentum Mill</a>	251-257
Manaturikumwe Emmanuel, Rukangantambara Hamoud, Gasana Gasabato Quénan, Niyonkuru Rose, Nsengiyumva Jean Nepo	
<a href="#">Mesenchymal Stem Cell Therapy For COVID-19; Is A New Challenge Review</a>	258-263
Maged Naser, Mohamed MN, Lamia H. Shehata	
<a href="#">Hair Loss in Foreign Medical Students and Alter its Intensity during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Georgia</a>	264-273
Naga Harika Korrapati, Priyanka Bhowmik	
<a href="#">Variations Intra-Saisonnères des Pluies et Production Agricole dans la Commune de Tori Bossito au Bénin</a>	274-285
Rafiatou BAMISSO, Djafarou ABDOULAYE	
<a href="#">Croissance Urbaine Et Terres Agricoles Dans La Ville De Pobe</a>	286-299
Pamphile HOUNDJI, Eusébe C. M. CAPO, Issihako ZIME LAFIA, Rock ADOUKO	
<a href="#">Les Déterminants De La Performance Des Projets Et Programmes De Développement Au Burkina Faso</a>	300-313
Abdoulaye OUEDRAOGO, Atahualpa SOSA LOPEZ	
<a href="#">Documenting An Audit Of Financial Statements Based On International Auditing Standards</a>	314-321
E. Muydinov, A. Mamazhonov	
<a href="#">A Review Of The Relationship Of Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, And Individual Consideration With Sustainable Employees Performance</a>	322-326
Asma Ul Hosna, Sunan Islam, Mahmud Hamid	

<a href="#">Pedagogical And Psychological Features Of The Small School Age</a> Mahmudova Nodira Alisherovna	327-334
<a href="#">Stages And Methods Of Analyzing The Texts Of A Book In Primary School</a> Akhmedova Dildora Bakhodirovna, Mаметјumayeва Gulasal Ruzimurodovna	335-339
<a href="#">Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence Using Different Techniques</a> Tojiboev Isakjon Madolimovich	340-344
<a href="#">Results Of Research On Fire-Technical Indications Determination Of Fire Resistant Textile Materials</a> N. V. Medentsev, M.R. Doschanov	345-351
<a href="#">English Explanation Of Medical Hybrid Terms With French Prefix "Anti"</a> Bobokalonov Rajab	352-356
<a href="#">Western's Media Representation of Palestine</a> Rym Ezzina	357-365
<a href="#">Strengthening Professionalism Teacher A Necessity</a> Syukri Hamzah, Nurul Hidayati	366-374
<a href="#">Role Of Mahalla's Participation In The Development Of Education</a> Bahridinov Nuriddin Sadriddinovich, Turgunov Avazkhon Axmadjanovich	375-378
<a href="#">On A Cauchy Problem In A Hilbert Space With Operator Coefficients</a> Gafarov Ilg'or Ahmedjanovich, Eshmatov Davron Abduvaxobovich	379-382
<a href="#">Student Perception Of The Use Of Remote Control Application In Guidance On Completion Of Lecture Assignments Learning Evaluation</a> Syukri Hamzah, Nurul Hidayati	383-388
<a href="#">Integrated Quality Management of The State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Medan in The Development of Graduation Skills Based on Soft Skills</a> Junianto Sitorus, Ahmad Husein Ritonga, Martinis Yamin	389-400
<a href="#">Evaluation des Caractéristiques Biophysiques des Ressources Ligneuses du Mont Gangan dans la Préfecture de Kindia, Guinée.</a> Soua DORE, Youssef CONDE, Boubacar Cissoko, Ansoumane SAKOUVOGUI	401-409
<a href="#">Usefulness of E-module Based on Experiential Learning in Physics Learning</a> Nurul Fadieny, Ahmad Fauzi	410-414
<a href="#">Perceptions Et Adaptation Des Femmes Agricultrices Aux Risques Climatiques Dans La Commune De Ouèssè</a> Edith Oré YAHA, Malomon Atchamou Bola, Ibouaïma YABI, Fanakpon Joseph DJEVI	415-424

# *Communication Practices of Single Mothers in Carrying Out Their Dual Roles*

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**Abstract** – The research aims to analyze the communication practices of single mothers in carrying out their dual roles. This research approach is a critical qualitative case study method. The research data were collected through in-depth interviews with a number of informants and participatory observation. The research results show that there are five interaction arenas of single mothers in carrying out their dual roles, i.e. with their household, fellow single mothers, women, men, and with the environment / community. Communication practices that they are carrying out are interpersonal, avoiding conflict when interacting with men, and messages that tend to be emphatic when interacting with the community. Therefore, communicating their dual roles is a necessity because single mothers are frequently confused when they have to choose between housewife and modest public / productive role or they try to balance both roles if they have a larger productive role.

**Keywords** – Single Mother, Dual Roles, Interpersonal Communication.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dual roles are something that adult women usually do [1] [2] [3]. However, the dual roles are most clearly seen in women single parent [4] [5]. The position of women who carries out the dual roles leaves a number of problems ranging from the difficulty of sharing roles proportionally [6], stress and vulnerability at work [7], to the skewed viewpoints of society [8].

The facts show that the number of single parents in Indonesia has been increasing. The data on the percentage of households by province, residence area and gender of heads of household in the period of 2009-2019 [9] show that 84.54% are headed by men, both complete families (father, mother, children), or incomplete family (father and children). The remaining of 15.46% are families headed by women (an increase if compared to the previous year (2018) by 15.17%).

Putri et al., [10] argue that there are a number of reasons why women become heads of households while they are simultaneously carrying out the dual roles, i.e. 1) Women who are divorced / dead by their husbands, namely women are required to work hard to earn a living themselves and to support their households, replacing the role of their husbands, 2) A married woman, but the income is not sufficient for family needs because her husband is unemployed / has no income, is also disabled, 3) The woman is alone, but has to earn a living to replace her parents' position.

Setiawan [11] states that the problems that women experience as single parents are very complex. Firstly, women have to raise their children alone. This is very difficult, at a time when children are growing, and looking for self-identity, they really need a

father figure. Secondly, women who become single parents also experience economic problems, particularly if they do not work when they get married and they only rely on income from their husbands. When suddenly she loses a husband who has been supporting the economy of the single parent family and she does not have a fixed income nowadays, as a single parent she frequently faces economic difficulties.

The existence of a single mother who carrying out the dual roles will have an impact on the imbalance of family functions. Family life feels bland, full of stress, minimal interaction, lonely dialogue, discussion and exchange of ideas in the family [12]. This condition will lead to distant relationships among household members.

From the description at above, it is necessary to establish or create a model of communication practices that are harmonious and in harmony in household, single mothers and children and other household members. This harmonious communication will determine the closeness of the relationship between household members [13]. According to Wahidah [14], communication in the household is defined as openness to convey everything in the household, in terms of good and bad matters, and also preparing to solve every problem in the household in a patient, honest and open way. Furthermore, Kusuma [15] states that healthy communication is also open in which it is very necessary in maintaining a harmonious relationship between parents and children.

Communication in the households of single mother has a strategic position in maintaining bonds with children [16]. With open communication, children will see and assess their relationship with their parents. Yarosh et al. [17] argue that the main problem in the households of single mother is maintaining communication, related to children's activities and finding topics in conversation.

It occurs when the position of men as fathers in the households is vacant. Furthermore, mother take over the function of the head of household, so all domains in the household become the authority of the mother, including in terms of communication with children. Not only in the aspect of communication, the loss of the father's role in the household causes unbalanced parenting and shifts in the obligations of the father that a mother must bear. This means that as a single parent the mother has dual obligations in her household.

The difficult situation is seen in the households of single mother. Not only single mothers, but children also experience shocks and shifting relationships with their household due to the separation of their parents [18]. Children who are cared for by single mothers encounter more problems than those with complete parents due to the presence of a father and mother who are accompanying them [19]. Parenting for single mothers, both those who suffer and who die, also affects the psychological life of the children [20].

Based on the background at above, this research will investigate how communication practices of single mothers in carrying out their dual roles. The research objective was to analyze the communication practices carried out by single mothers.

## II. METHOD

This research applies a critical qualitative approach. According to Liliweri [21], the critical paradigm departs from critical theories which aim to defend ideas that are ready to criticize and resolve social inequalities in the domination of power / in this matter, the power of the majority of society, i.e. men called patriarchal culture. Guba and Lincoln [22] state that in qualitative research, the focus of attention is at the general level with a variety of methods, interpretive and naturalist approaches to a research subject. Moreover, Moleong [23], the qualitative research intends to understand the phenomenon of research subjects by describing words and language in a special and natural scope through the use of natural methods.

The research method here is a single descriptive case study [24]. Furthermore, Yin mentions five important components that must be present in a case study, i.e.: 1) Research questions, 2) Proposition, 3) Unit of analysis, 4) Logic linking data and propositions, 5) Criteria for interpreting the findings. Finally, Stake [25] also states that case studies are used for specific case research, and it is expected that it can present a useful viewpoint on a problem for theoretical improvement. it means that if a case is examined deeply, investigated in detail, then the daily activities are solved. The selection of research informants was carried out purposively and snowball. The data collection techniques used here were in-depth interviews and participatory observation.

## III. RESULT

This research will analyze how communication practices of single mothers when they are carrying out dual roles. The informants in this research have identified a number of issues relevant to their experience of communicating their dual roles (Table 1).



Table 1. Communication Practices in Carrying Out Dual Roles

Interaction Arena	Communication Practices
Interaction with household members	Interpersonal
Interaction with other single mothers	Interpersonal
Interaction with other women	Interpersonal
Interaction with men	Emphatic messages and avoidance in interpersonal conflict
Interaction with environment and public	Emphatic messages tend to focus on problems and do not "patronize"

When communicating dual roles to their household members, fellow single mothers or fellow women, the informants practiced interpersonal communication. This interpersonal communication aims to familiarize the interaction and therefore, it creates a positive impression of the status of single mothers who are carrying out dual roles without neglecting their status as mothers, for example in child care. The informant Wn stated:

"At least if we want to go sleep, we take the time to tell stories. It is definitely really a good mother ... It likes that. After telling stories, we feed the food when children eat like that. It is definitely the tasks of a real mother. Otherwise, if about the function of father he teaches us more about how to get out. It is like that."

Wn also said that 'establishing communication with household members is an important aspect in carrying out dual roles'. This is because, she said, as a mother, she still prioritizes communication with her children as part of "an effort to provide understanding to the household members about the position currently held by the mother".

However, not all informants felt the need to clearly communicate dual roles to their families. The informant Im has pointed out that when carrying out dual roles, the oint we have to have is honesty to acknowledge the status which for some people is stigmatic. She said:

"Yes, it is like that the honesty means that what we must do anything honestly. What I mean that we try to be honest not to do such things (negative things) firstly to ourselves. We must be honest with ourselves, for example ... 'with the status of widow', we know the meaning of 'widow' word'."

Therefore, for the informant Im, because she is not an extrovert woman, communicating her dual roles is best 'exemplified through deeds' rather than through words which actually stimulate misunderstanding in her household, among the household members and outside her household. For their households, interpersonal communication is the best choice with "more polite messages" while for outside of their households, the choice is interpersonal communication with "emphatic messages". Hy said:

"Yes, for externals, we only see what the the case is ... if it is formal, if some ask me whether I am married or not, I will say it formally. It depends on the asking person I will definitely say that I am a single parent, a single mother."

The informant Wd said the message she wants to convey regarding the status of single mother and her dual roles is that the position of a single mother is something that she must be carried out at this time, so complaining is not a way out. She said:

"The message is more that I have to carry out it. That the point ... Enjoy it. Live with it. Be grateful with it. So the point is that we do not make any complaint. At the time ... the message was already that. This is what we have to live with it at this time. So don't make any complaint ... because there is a time for everything."

The informant Wn also states the same thing. According to the informant, currently the stigma against single mothers is so strong. Therefore, it is necessary to prove that this stigma is unusual. Wn stated:

"Well, what we needs is to prove it, my sister. The proof is how we behave, how we can be accepted among them ... It is the point. So it's okay ... for example in the social regular gathering of heads of household, I will say that there is no head of household in my household, but I live in the community. I am a member of the community, I have to know the activities in my environment. It also prevails for my children."

Based on the findings of the communication practice, interpersonal communication is a choice to reveal the dual role of single mothers to outsiders, both households and friends. This is in line with the conception of interpersonal communication in the family as stated by Supratman (2017) that households, particularly children, need complete parents to create healthy family communication. This is because children will find it difficult to build an identity without the help of the whole family. Single parent support in establishing good interpersonal communication and it makes children learn to be brave by accepting new family structure situations. Without good interpersonal communication, children will be confused to interpret their identity.

To more clearly understand interpersonal communication patterns as a practice in communicating dual roles, the communication practice model of a single mother can be built in carrying out multiple roles, as presented in Figure 1 below:

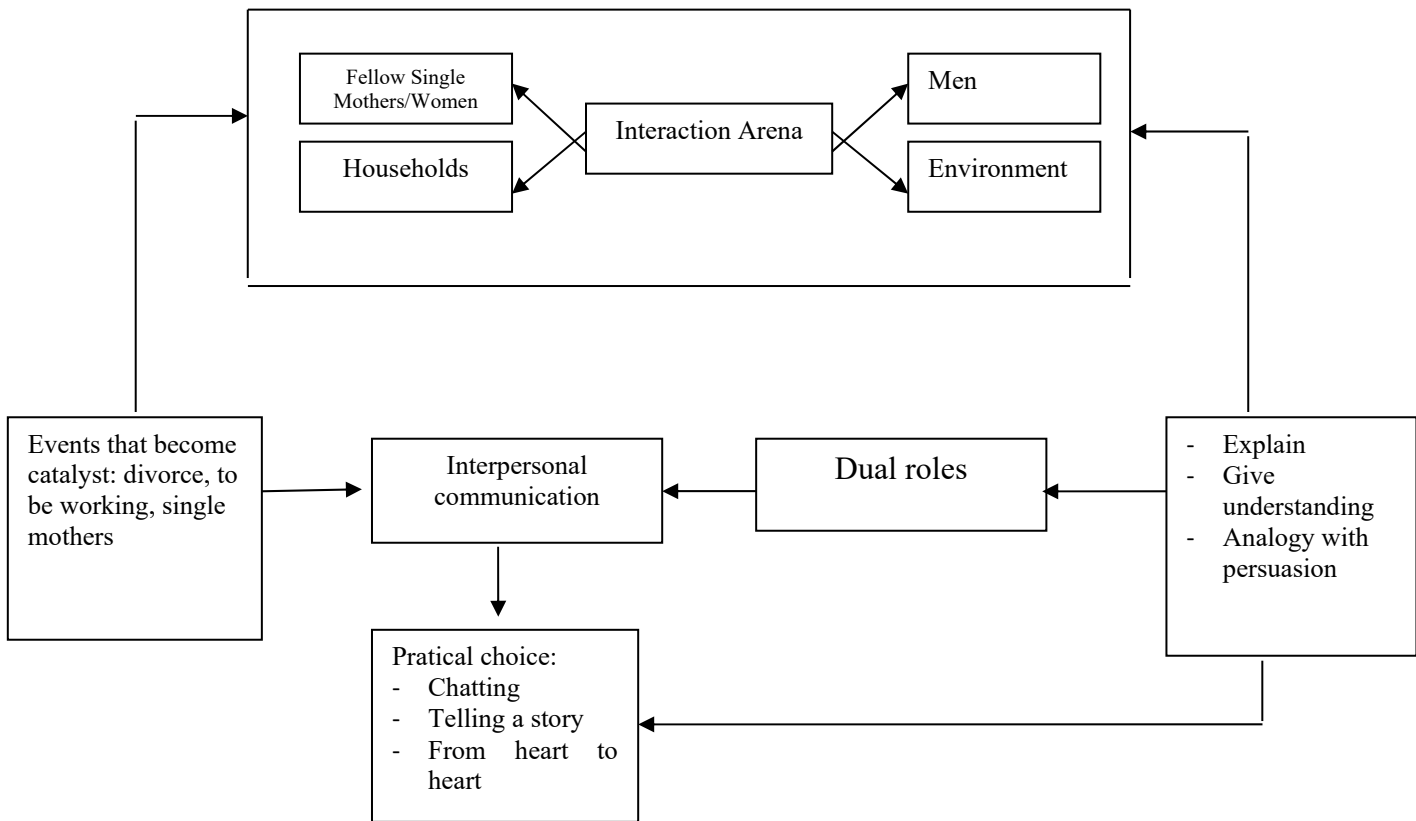


Figure 1. Model of interpersonal communication of single mother

As in the above model strengthened by the researches of Suryadinata [26], Supratman [27] concerning interpersonal communication and Retnowati et al., [28] Sari [29], concerning family communication in households with single mothers and Cools [30] concerning the communication of multicultural single mothers that without communication within households or particularly good interpersonal communication, children can take negative actions as a way to require for more attention as well as their nonverbal symbols for disapproval of the divorce of their parents. Therefore, single mothers must play a dual role. Moreover, children will observe how their parents respond to the divorce.

Caughlin et al., [31] have stated that importance of interpersonal communication in families where carrying out multiple roles. According to Caughlin, communication is the way in which family relationships are built and maintained, attachments and intimacy are created, children are socialized, gender roles and expectations are formed, decisions are made, problems and conflicts are resolved, social support is provided, and the physical and mental well-being of others is affected. Therefore, family communication is an important outcome variable because understanding how families communicate is likely to appreciate how other factors further affect the household and individual household members. There is an overall negative effect of divorce on children, for example, but the 'divorce effect depends on the nature of communication' between divorce or divorcing parents.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Communicating dual roles is a necessity because single mothers are frequently confused when they have to choose between housewife and modest public / productive role or they try to balance both roles if they have a larger productive role. This is because when women become more and busy in their careers, they are sometimes seen negatively. Moreover, due to gender issues many single mothers cannot get high positions in companies. Definitely no one enforces that a single mother is supposed to be what and how. One thing that needs to be underlined is that Indonesian women should be able to become figures who are not only reproductive figures but also productive and social ones.

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