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Visualizing domestic masculinity: Negotiation, representation, and visual absence among stay-at-home fathers

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how stay-at-home fathers in Indonesia construct and negotiate masculine identities through visual practices within a social context where caregiving remains strongly associated with women and men continue to be positioned as primary breadwinners. Using a photo-elicitation method, 17 participants documented their domestic experiences through self-produced photographs, archival images, and reflective interviews. The findings show that domestic masculinity is not a fixed category but a spectrum of representations shaped through everyday practices, emotional presence, symbolic expressions, and visual absence. Participants articulated their roles through domestic labor, relational engagement with children, and metaphorical imagery that rearticulated masculine values such as strength, responsibility, and protection within the domestic sphere. At the same time, tensions persisted between caregiving and expectations surrounding men's economic provision, suggesting that domestic masculinity is continuously negotiated rather than fundamentally transformed. In some instances, the absence of images highlighted the limits of representation, including concerns surrounding privacy, legitimacy, and self-perception. Photography functioned as a reflective and representational medium through which participants negotiated masculinity in everyday domestic life. The study contributes to discussions on domestic masculinity and visual representation in Southeast Asian contexts, while also highlighting the importance of considering visual negotiation, selective visibility, and social legitimacy in future studies of fatherhood and caregiving.

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Introduction

Men who assume primary roles in the domestic sphere, commonly referred to as stay-at-home fathers, engage in ongoing negotiations of masculine identity in everyday life. Their involvement in caregiving gives rise to alternative masculinities that integrate traditionally masculine and feminine values (Lee & Lee, 2018), shaped by the interaction between caregiving practices, breadwinner expectations, and family honor within collectivist contexts (Shah, 2026). Such roles are not solely the result of individual choice but are influenced by familial negotiations, economic conditions, and broader social transformations (Doucet, 2016). While stay-at-home fathers may challenge gender stereotypes and strengthen father–child relationships (Smith, 2009; Rushing & Powell, 2015), their domestic labor often remains devalued, situated within tensions between ideals of equality and persistent patriarchal norms (Robb, 2020).

In Indonesia, the roles of fathers have traditionally been shaped by a gendered division of labor separating the public and private spheres, positioning men as breadwinners and heads of households and women as caregivers. Reinforced through colonization and modernization, this configuration established a Western-type dichotomy associating masculinity with productivity and public authority (Prianti, 2019; Gavanas, 2004:99). However, everyday family practices have long been more complex, with women frequently contributing economically while men retain symbolic authority (Geerd, 1961), a pattern later institutionalized during the New Order through *state Ibuism* (Suryakusuma, 2011). As a result, men's domestic labor continues to be regarded as non-normative, while women often carry a double burden of productive and reproductive work (Brenner, 1998).

Over the past two decades, social, economic, and cultural changes have reshaped family practices in Indonesia. The increasing participation of women in the workforce, alongside the expansion of flexible employment arrangements such as freelancing, remote work, and digital-sector jobs, has enabled a more flexible distribution of domestic responsibilities, particularly in urban contexts. Although Indonesia continues to show a significant gender gap in labor-force participation, with female participation remaining substantially lower than men's (Manalu & Aprilia, 2023), regional labor patterns reveal more complex gender dynamics, including female-dominated industries such as eyelash production in Purbalingga, Central Java, and garment manufacturing in Subang, West Java (Ajiningtyas & Pranoto, 2023; Nur'aeni et al., 2023). In addition, the large-scale migration of Indonesian women workers since the 2000s has contributed to shifting household arrangements, including the emergence of stay-at-home fathers (Fu et al., 2022; Tuhumuri & Tobing, 2024).

According to the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN, 2021–2022), paternal involvement in childcare is increasing (Shanti, 2023), although reports from UNICEF and Statistics Indonesia (BPS, 2021) continue to highlight father absence, indicating persistent structural challenges in caregiving participation. Such shifts are reflected in programs such as the Indonesian Exemplary Fathers Movement (GATi) and "Fathers Accompanying Children on the First Day of School" (Persaulian, 2025). However, increased paternal involvement does not necessarily indicate structural transformation in masculinity. Recent studies in Asian and Muslim contexts suggest that domestic participation among fathers often remains entangled with expectations surrounding masculine legitimacy, economic provision, and moral authority (Tsang, 2024; Shah, 2023; Alatas, 2025). In this sense, domestic masculinity may be understood less as a rupture from dominant masculinity than as an adaptive and negotiated practice situated within ongoing tensions between care, provision, and social legitimacy (Doucet, 2006; Deutsch, 2007; Dermott, 2008).

Although research on fatherhood and domestic masculinity has expanded, following Gorman-Murray (2008), domestic masculinity may be understood as emerging through changing domestic practices and negotiations within the home as a relational and representational space. Existing studies remain largely grounded in Western contexts and interview- or survey-based approaches. Recent studies in Asian and Southeast Asian contexts further suggest that stay-at-home fathers negotiate masculinity through tensions surrounding breadwinner expectations, social stigma, moral legitimacy, and shifting family roles (Tsang, 2024; Shah, 2023; Shah, 2025; Alatas, 2025). However, the visual and representational dimensions of these negotiations remain underexplored. In this study, domestic masculinity refers to the ways masculine identities are negotiated and represented through caregiving practices, domestic participation, emotional presence, and everyday household experiences.

This study seeks to explore how Indonesian stay-at-home fathers use participatory photography to depict their domestic lives and construct masculine identities (MacIsaac, 2021; Allen, 2020). The emphasis is placed on photographs produced by participants as reflective media through which experiences of masculinity and domestic life are articulated, negotiated, and represented.

Method

The study employed photo-elicitation, a visual method that uses photographs to facilitate interviews exploring participants' experiences, interpretations, and reflections, while fostering a more collaborative research relationship (Harper, 2002; Langa, 2008; Rose, 2016). The primary data sources consisted of the participants themselves—men who primarily identify as stay-at-home fathers and who engage in both visual production and reflective practices.

The data consisted of (1) photographs produced by participants during the research process, (2) archival or found images used reflectively, and (3) photo-elicitation interview data comprising the narratives, experiences, and meanings associated with these visual practices.

Photo-elicitation assumes that images can convey rich social information, evoke memories and emotional responses, and prompt forms of dialogue that may not emerge through conventional interview techniques (Rose, 2016: 315-318). In addition, this study also drew on academic literature and government administrative data as secondary sources to contextualize the empirical findings.

Table 1. List of Participants

Initials	Age	Work Status	Stay-at-Home Type	Photo
AS	29	Factory Worker	Part	39
HN	32	Freelance	Part	21
SH	34	Content Creator	Full	24
AF	34	Photographer	Part	15
DP	34	Photographer	Part	13
SP	35	Ride-hailing Driver	Part	16
RR	36	Consultant	Part	41
SM	37	Photojournalist	Part	12
AS	38	Electrician	Part	63
B	39	Public Official	Part	7
RS	40	Informal Worker	Full	0
ES	42	Unemployed	Full	0
M	43	Vendor	Part	15
YR	46	Informal Worker	Full	17
H	49	Unemployed	Full	34
MA	50	Multiple professional roles (supervisory board member, director of institutional relations, and company commissioner)	Part	8
BS	52	Unemployed	Full	36
Total				**361**

Source, Author's documentation, 2025

The study adhered to principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and protection from potential social risks. All images were used with participants' consent. Participants were recruited through a Facebook page titled "*Penelitian Bapak Rumah Tangga*," with Facebook Ads used to direct prospective participants to a Google Form registration link. The first advertisement (June 17, 2025) targeted househusbands engaged in full-time, part-time, or flexible work arrangements, resulting in 31 applicants. The second advertisement (June 20, 2025) specifically targeted full-time stay-at-home fathers and attracted 51 applicants. Recruitment posters were also shared via the researcher's personal Instagram account and subsequently reposted by the *Aliansi Laki-laki Baru* and *Bapak Rumah Tangga* accounts.

A total of 82 individuals initially expressed interest in participating. To be eligible, men had to have been married for at least four years and be heavily involved in household duties, either as full-time or part-time stay-at-home fathers. Participant selection took into account variation in age, place of origin, socioeconomic background, education, employment status, and domestic responsibilities. This diversity was not intended for comparative analysis but rather to explore how the role of the stay-at-home father is enacted across different socio-cultural contexts. Of the registered applicants, 20 were selected, and 17 remained engaged through the analysis phase.

During the data collection phase, participants were given two to three months to document their domestic experiences

using a mobile phone or personal camera, without specific visual style guidelines. This approach was intended to preserve the participatory nature of photo-elicitation. We provided only a set of reflective prompts to guide participants in documenting their domestic experiences, the challenges they faced, and their interpretations of masculinity.

After the photographs were collected, they were codified into thematic categories. The subsequent phase involved photo-elicitation interviews to explore participants' narratives and reflections on the images they had produced. The interviews were conducted between November 10 and 20, 2025, using both online and in-person formats, with each session lasting approximately one to two hours, in line with photo-elicitation interview approaches employed in previous studies (Craig et al., 2020; Regoczi & Shanmugam, 2024; Marshall et al., 2023).

Using images as an interview tool allowed participants to reflect on their domestic experiences and the negotiation of masculine identity in everyday life. This visual methodology aligns with photovoice research suggesting that photography can facilitate reflective processes and challenge dominant ideals of masculinity (Hegarty, 2016).

The data analysis was informed by three of the four visual contexts proposed by Rose (2016: 24–47)—the site of production, the site of the image, and the site of audiencing—considered alongside technological, compositional, and social modalities. Rather than being applied as fixed analytical categories, these frameworks functioned as flexible interpretive lenses for understanding how photographs are produced, represented, and interpreted in relation to participants' experiences.

Results and Discussion

Visual narratives and the construction of masculinity among stay-at-home fathers

Masculinity among stay-at-home fathers in this study is mediated through participant-generated visual narratives that reflect everyday experiences, challenges, and interpretations of masculinity. Rather than functioning as objective documentation (Sekula, 1982; Berger, 1990:47), these images are understood as social and representational artifacts shaped by processes of production, selective framing, and anticipated audience interpretation (Pitcher & Boonzaier, 2023). The photographs therefore do not merely record domestic life, but reflect ongoing negotiations surrounding visibility, legitimacy, privacy, and masculine identity within everyday family contexts.

The resulting images, both spontaneous and archival, reveal domestic masculinity as situational and temporal, shaped by shifting life trajectories and social positions. In line with Gorman-Murray (2008), domestic masculinity emerges through changing domestic practices, while also reflecting masculinity as a fluid and relational construct (Kimmel, 2004). In this context, the home functions not merely as a physical setting for domestic activities, but as a space where masculine identity is continuously negotiated, represented, and legitimized through everyday practices and visual positioning.

These representations demonstrate different forms of domestic participation. Some participants describe routine household work as a mundane part of everyday life, while others emphasize emotional and relational presence through interactions with children and family. This variation suggests a tension between the practices of caregiving and the social boundaries of masculinity,

negotiated in practice and in representation. Self-positioning as visible subjects or implicit photographers varies, suggesting that masculinity can be performed through roles and relationships rather than bodily presence. Visual literacy also varies, affecting strategies from symbolic to more direct forms.

Differences in engagement are also evident in the number of images produced and instances of visual absence. Decisions not to submit photographs reflect not only technical constraints but also discomfort with representation and concerns about social evaluation, underscoring how visuality is shaped by normative expectations of masculinity. Rather than pointing toa singular form, the findings reveal a spectrum of visual practices, including literal, relational, symbolic, and absent representations, that reflect ongoing processes of negotiation. Photography thus functions as a site of reflection and symbolic mediation (Hegarty, 2016), situated within a broader cultural framework linking individual experience and social interpretation (Solomon-Godeau, 2017: 26).

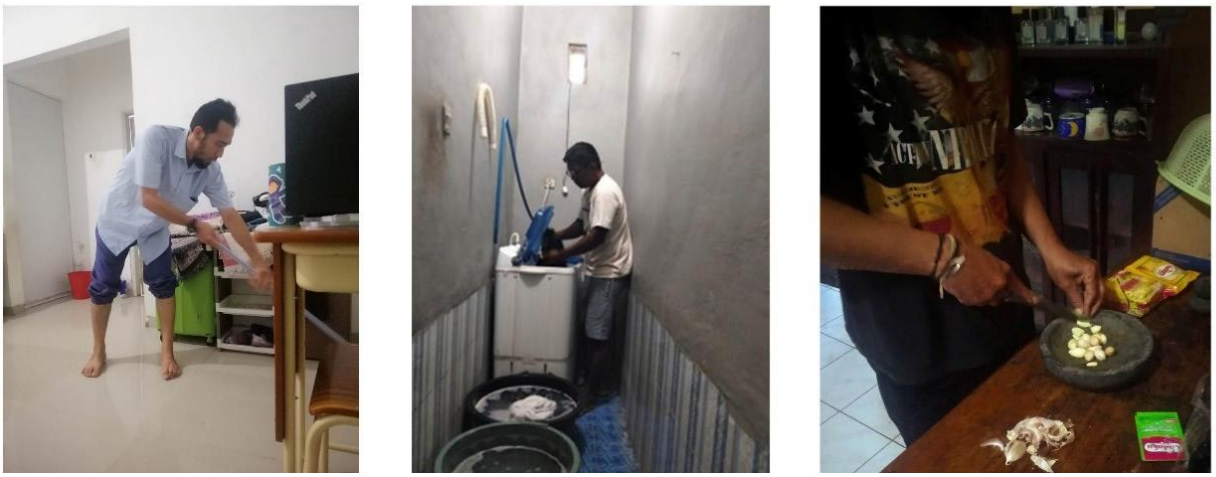
Visuality provides a means for expressing domestic masculinity without fully challenging dominant norms. These images do not deconstruct gender boundaries so much as reframe them in more flexible ways, implying that changes in domestic masculinity happen incrementally, not through radical change.

Domestic labor and literal representation

Several photographs explicitly depict the involvement of stay-at-home fathers in domestic labor. This group of images represents activities such as cooking, washing dishes, mopping floors, hanging laundry, cleaning the house, bathing children, and caring for ill family members, presented in a literal manner without overt symbolic framing. The photographs are typically captured in everyday contexts as snapshots, characterized by ordinary perspectives and minimal aesthetic elaboration.

This pattern is evident across a substantial number of participants' photographs. For instance, one image shows participant YR

Figure 1. Domestic Labor (M, YR, BS)



Source: Left photograph by participant M; center photograph by participant YR; right photograph by participant BS, produced during the photo-elicitation process (2025).

Figure 2. Domestic labor (HN)



Source: Participant HN, produced during the photo-elicitation process (2025)

operating a washing machine; another depicts participant M mopping his home; participant HN bathing his child; participant BS preparing food; participant B hanging laundry; and participant WS caring for an ill child.

For some participants, photographing domestic tasks is understood as an extension of everyday routine rather than a special or staged activity. This is reflected in the documentary-like visual quality, spontaneous composition, and the use of smartphone cameras as the primary medium. Domestic labor is thus framed as repetitive and continuous, rather than as a performance constructed specifically for visual representation.

An aesthetic approach is nevertheless evident in certain cases, such as in the images produced by participant HN; however, it is deliberately employed to protect the child's privacy. The participant adopts a visual strategy characterized by subdued lighting and silhouetted forms, thereby depicting the act of bathing a child without revealing the child's identity. Here, aesthetics functions not as an embellishment or visual enhancement, but as an expression of ethical awareness in representing intimate caregiving interactions.

In these images, the male body is often visibly present as the agent of care. The inclusion of the body within the frame signals direct engagement and visually asserts that domestic labor constitutes an integral dimension of everyday masculinity. However, this bodily representation is not consistently heroic or central; in many photographs, the body appears in an ordinary, unaccentuated manner—faces may be excluded, the camera positioned behind the subject, and the body blending into the domestic environment or household objects.

Moreover, capturing photographs with the assistance of family members, such as a spouse or child, highlights that a father's domestic role is not an individual endeavor but a relational practice. This process contributes to the construction and understanding of masculinity in relation to family dynamics and broader social contexts (Stout & Collin, 2024). It also points to the notion of visual agency as relationally distributed rather than individually controlled. Fathers do not exercise full autonomy over their representation; instead, it is shaped through interactions within the family.

In addition, awareness of the audience, whether immediate or imagined through the potential circulation of photographs,

Figure 3. Domestic Labor (B)



Source, Participant B, produced during the photo-elicitation process (2025)

influences how participants present, curate, and reinterpret their domestic practices. Images engage with social norms that shape who is considered "worthy" for particular domestic responsibilities. The experience of participant B illustrates the tangible impact of such social scrutiny in everyday life.

Participant B's account further demonstrates that routine domestic activities, such as hanging laundry, are subject to forms of social surveillance. In one of the photographs he submitted, participant B recounted that a neighbor questioned his wife's absence by asking, "Where is your wife?"—a remark that reflects the assumption that domestic responsibilities are inherently feminine. To avoid potential social repercussions for his wife, participant B responded by stating that she was unwell, despite the answer not reflecting the actual situation.

Participant B's spouse expressed similar concerns about the photograph being circulated in public. There was concern that an image of her husband engaging in household chores might risk negative social interpretations, such as that she was shirking her duties. The photograph is a site where meaning is negotiated at the intersection of visual practices, verbal strategies and gender dynamics.

The images in this section suggest that, for some participants, domestic masculinity does not require symbolic mediation but is articulated through the repetition of everyday practices and the visibility of forms of labor often perceived as lacking masculinity. Rather than being framed as heroic, domestic work appears as normalized and routine.

Affective presence and non-work masculinity

In another set of images, fathers' domestic involvement is represented through emotional and relational presence, emphasizing intimacy, care, and engagement without explicitly depicting routine household labor. This category includes photographs of fathers interacting with their children during play, study, watching television, walking, or spending leisure time in shared domestic spaces.

This visual narrative positions fathers not merely as performers of domestic labor but as figures who are present, guiding, and emotionally supportive. Such presence is often conveyed through gestures, spatial proximity, and the father's positioning within the domestic environment. This pattern is evident in several examples: participant SH playing with his two children; AS watching television with his child on his lap; HN guiding his child in learning to read the

Figure 4. Affective Presence (SH, AS, RR)



Source: Left and center photograph by participant SH and participant AS, produced during the photo-elicitation process (2025); right: participant RR personal archive

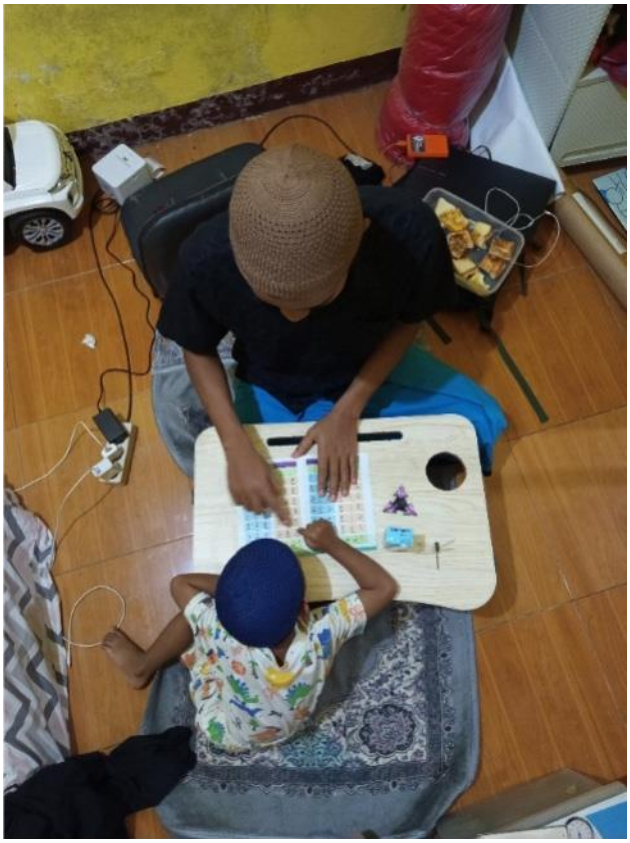
Iqra'; RR embracing his children after prayer; and AS documenting his child's weight measurement at a community health post (*Posyandu*). Rather than functioning solely as a feminized domestic sphere, the home becomes a relational space through which masculine identity is articulated through care, guidance, and emotional presence.

The decision not to explicitly depict household labor can be understood as a visual strategy that maintains a degree of separation between masculinity and caregiving, while still engaging the domestic sphere. It suggests that non-work masculinity enables individuals to navigate societal expectations of fatherhood and masculine roles, particularly in contexts where domestic responsibilities remain strongly gendered.

Gestures such as holding a child on one's lap, engaging in play, or sitting in close proximity signify a non-hierarchical relationship, in which the father's body becomes a site of safety and emotional connection. Activities such as guiding children in learning to read the *Iqra'* or documenting moments after congregational prayer position the father as a moral and religious figure actively involved in shaping the child's values, discipline, and identity. The involvement of participants' partners in capturing these images further highlights the relational dimension of this representation, as the father's presence is not only self-expressed but also affirmed within the family context. These images suggest that domestic masculinity, even in the absence of visible household labor, is articulated through emotional intimacy, relational commitment, and active engagement in a child's life, rather than through explicit depictions of domestic tasks.

In the image of father teaching his child to read the *Iqra'*, affective presence is articulated not through bodily proximity but through intentional and organized relationality. The father and child are positioned facing each other with a small table between them and the height of the photograph emphasizes a

Figure 5. Affective Presence (HN)



Source: Participant HN, produced during the photo-elicitation process (2025)

self-possessed and measured interaction. The spatial distance is not a sign of emotional distance but the father's role as an educational mentor who supervises the child's learning and discipline.

In this way, the father's role in the home changes from that of a nurturing presence, physically close to his children, to that of a moral and educational guide. This visual differentiation implies that emotional presence is not necessarily founded on physical proximity, but is expressed through spatial arrangements, bodily positioning and modes of interaction that emphasize responsibility and authority in parenting.

The data also indicate that fathers' emotional and relational presence is not confined to private domestic spaces but extends into public settings traditionally associated with women, such as schools and community health facilities. Participant AS experience of accompanying his child to a community health post reflects a pattern similar to that of participant B. He reported being asked, "Where is your wife?"—a question that reveals the persistence of gendered expectations surrounding caregiving roles. His presence as a father in a space typically associated with maternal responsibility was perceived as atypical, suggesting that forms of care performed

Figure 6. Affective Presence (AS)



Source: Participant AS, produced during the photo-elicitation process (2025)

by men are not always recognized as fully legitimate within prevailing social norms.

A father's presence is not solely perceived as a caregiving role but also emerges as a point of intersection between emotional engagement and social surveillance. Accompanying children to such spaces illustrates how a father's presence can be simultaneously visible and subject to questioning, prompting an ongoing negotiation of meaning regarding who is considered worthy to participate in childcare.

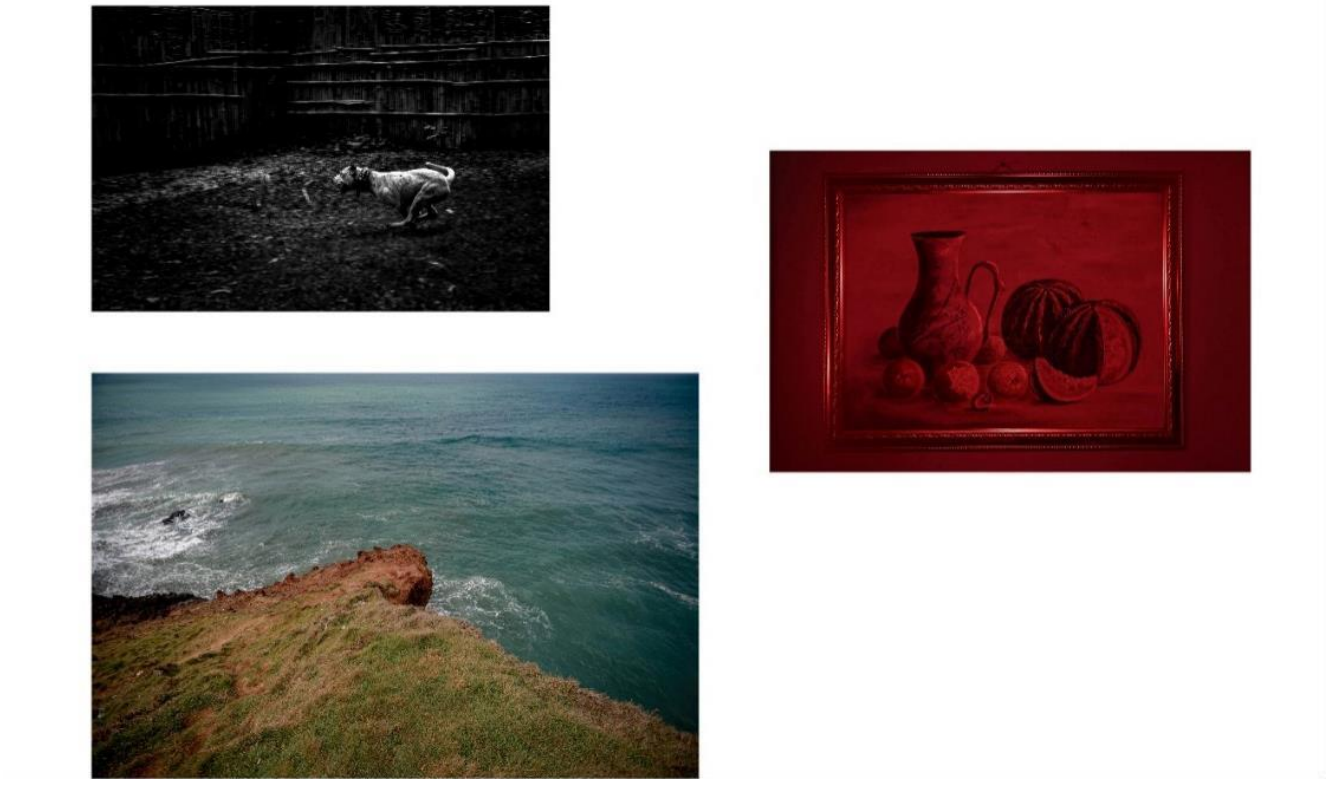
These experiences relate with recent studies of stay-at-home fathers, where paternal caregiving continues to be negotiated within persistent breadwinner expectations and gendered social norms (Shah, 2023; Alatas, 2025). Similar to participants in this study, fathers in Pakistan and Malaysia often experienced social scrutiny when occupying caregiving roles or entering spaces traditionally associated with women.

Symbolic, reflective, and metaphorical strategies

Not all participants adopted a literal approach to photographic representation. Some employed symbolic and metaphorical strategies to reflect on their experiences as stay-at-home fathers. These types of images were more frequently identified among participants with a professional background in photography, although they were not exclusively limited to this group.

Visual elements such as spatial composition, light, shadow, objects, and partial representations of the body are used to convey emotions, tensions, and personal reflections on domestic labor and

Figure 7. Symbolic Representation (AF)



Source: Participant AF personal archive

masculinity. In these images, meaning is not directly stated but emerges implicitly through visual associations and is further elaborated through participants' narratives during the photo-elicitation interviews.

This approach is exemplified in the images produced by participant AF, a photographer working in a government public relations office, who identifies as a stay-at-home father due to his substantial involvement in domestic responsibilities, including providing household needs, cooking, cleaning, and childcare. AF constructs his sense of masculinity through symbolic representations, such as images of pit bulls and coastal rocks, which he associates with strength and resilience.

Images such as a pit bull persistently confronting a wild boar despite visible wounds and a coral reef remaining intact after enduring relentless waves function as metaphors for strength and resilience. A reproduced photograph of a still-life painting dominated by red tones further signifies the participant's role as a provider, emphasizing the obligation to consistently supply nutritious food for the family. The use of red hues may also be read as suggesting a sense of alertness or latent risk, potentially reflecting the pressures accompanying the responsibility of provision. Another image depicts a pathway using leading lines, which the participant associated with the long and uncertain journey of his family life.

Other participants, particularly freelance photojournalists DP and SM, also employ similar visual strategies. SM produced a self-portrait wearing a Spider-Man mask, while DP captured a close-up image of his hand trimming his child's nails, isolating the act from its surrounding context and emphasizing the intimacy of the moment.

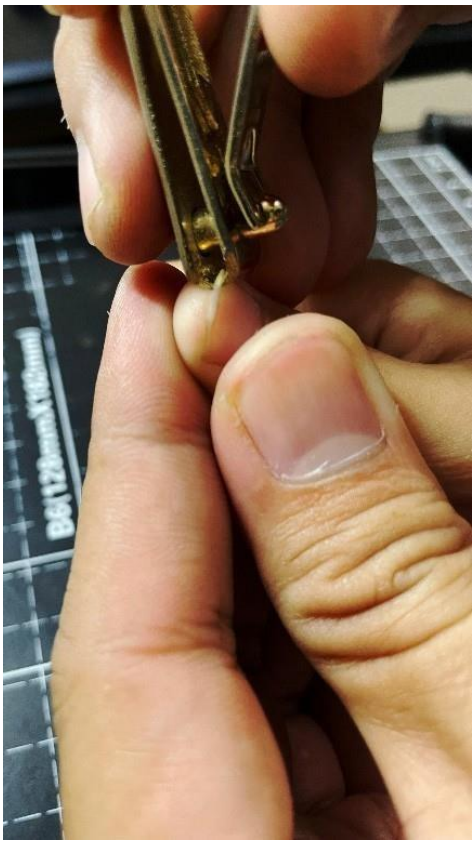
SM said the photo is his hope to be a heroic figure for his family, especially his children. By contrast, the image of DP shows a moment of bonding, through the

Figure 8. Symbolic Representation (SM)



Source, Participant SM, produced during the photo-elicitation process (2025)

Figure 9. Symbolic Representation (DP)



Source, Participant DP, produced during the photo-elicitation process (2025)

act of trimming nails, where intimacy is expressed not through verbal interaction but through proximity, touch, and close attention. Symbolic and metaphorical strategies may be articulated in all manner of registers, from overt heroic imagery to subtle representations of care and connection.

The choice of symbols and metaphors by participants reflects an effort to connect their own experiences with existing constructs of masculinity. For participants such as AF, SM, and DP, pit bulls, stones, superhero figures, and bodily gestures within caregiving practices became symbolic references through which strength, resilience, self-control, and protection were articulated.

These symbolic strategies suggest that some participants preferred to express domestic experiences indirectly rather than through literal representation. Photography is a medium for reflection, not just a means of recording activities. Thus domestic masculinity is a complex and often ambiguous internal experience that does not lend itself to easy visual representation. This analysis points to the relationship between visual literacy and cultural capital in shaping participants' representational strategies, and frames photography as a space for experimentation in re-imagining identity and social roles.

Masculinity among stay-at-home fathers in the study is not solely based on emotional and affective caregiving. For participants such as AF and SM, it remains associated with qualities like strength, resilience and protection, conveyed through visual narratives where the father is portrayed as a protective or even "superhero" figure. This finding in line with Alatas (2025), who argues that caring practices among Muslim fathers may coexist with enduring expectations of masculine authority and provision.

Puglisi et al. (2024) show that fathers' emotional involvement is associated with children's emotional regulation, father–child relationship quality, and family well-being. However, this approach often treats emotional involvement as an individual, measurable variable, overlooking how it is negotiated within masculine identity.

In everyday practice, men's emotional involvement in domestic life is shaped through various forms of negotiation. Expressions of affection and attachment are frequently framed within narratives of responsibility, protection, or companionship, allowing them to remain aligned with socially accepted forms of masculinity. Emotional involvement therefore does not necessarily dissolve gender boundaries; rather, it is adapted in ways that prevent significant deviation from established masculine norms.

Visual absence, selection, and the tension of representation

Among the 17 stay-at-home fathers who completed the study, two participants—RS and ES—chose not to submit any photographs, despite having initially consented to participate in a visually oriented research project. This visual absence is treated here as analytically significant, rather than merely as a lack of data.

The absence of visual material among these two participants stems from different reasons. Participant RS reported technical difficulties, including limited storage on his smartphone and occasionally forgetting to document his routine domestic activities. These factors suggest that the act of photographing does not always align seamlessly with everyday life, even when participants are aware of the research design and expectations.

In contrast, participant ES offered a more reflective perspective on visual practice. He articulated his criteria for an ideal photograph—one that appears natural, uncontrived, and free from artificial staging. In his view, a meaningful photograph is one

that seems to emerge organically, without visible intervention from the camera.

To achieve this ideal, participant ES attempted to photograph himself and also asked his child to capture images of him performing various domestic tasks, such as washing dishes, cooking, and mopping the floor. However, each attempt resulted in the deletion of the images, as he perceived them as unnatural and inconsistent with his envisioned mode of representation.

The participant explained that the presence of a camera directed at him altered his behavior. He felt more rigid, pressured, and uncomfortable, making activities that he usually performed spontaneously in everyday life feel staged when documented. The camera is not merely a passive recording tool but an agent that intensifies self-awareness and a sense of being observed, shaping how the body and gestures are performed.

This discomfort is not related to the nature of domestic labor. The participant emphasized that he had no objection to performing household tasks and did not perceive them as diminishing his masculinity. Therefore, his absence from the visual dataset should not be interpreted as a rejection of domestic roles, but rather as a reflection of the tensions inherent in visual representation.

Participant ES described his discomfort as a "border," which he framed as a boundary of privacy rather than a reflection of social norms. This boundary refers to a personal domain that he perceived as being intruded upon when intimate domestic moments were required to be visually exposed, making them subject to observation, evaluation, and interpretation by others.

Photography understood as a practice with relational and representational implications, rather than merely a tool for documenting activities. The participant's decision to delete the images he produced reflects an awareness of how meaning may shift when personal experiences are translated into visual form. This visual absence suggests that some domestic experiences are difficult to represent, as they generate tensions in identity, even when routinely lived. When experiences must be "translated" into images, questions emerge concerning authenticity, appropriateness, and the acceptable limits of self-exposure.

Participant ES discontinued the representational process at the stage of self-evaluation, in contrast to other participants who engaged in visual selection by choosing particular moments, perspectives, or activities. The images were not rejected due to their content but because they failed to provide an authentic and adequate representation of the self. In this case, visual absence can be understood as a strategy of self-regulation. The participant chose to present no image instead of attributing meaning to one he perceived as inauthentic. Thus, visual absence operates as a means of preserving both the integrity of lived experience and the boundaries of personal privacy.

These findings indicate that photo-elicitation does not always result in the production of visual data; instead, it generates critical reflection on the relationship between the body, the camera, and identity. When the presence of the camera alters the subject's behavior and sense of self, visual representation may be experienced as an intrusion upon the lived experience itself.

In contrast to the preceding discussions, where domestic masculinity is articulated through visible labor, emotional presence, or symbolic representation. This section reveals masculinity through a deliberate disengagement from visuality. This disengagement is driven not by social stigma, but by the need to preserve authenticity and privacy within domestic life. Consequently, the absence of visual representation expands

our understanding of the negotiation of domestic masculinity as a process that does not necessarily culminate in visibility. Masculinity is constructed not only through what is made visible but also through decisions about what remains unseen.

Negotiating masculinity through temporal narratives

A distinct visual narrative is presented by participant H, who is currently a full-time stay-at-home father. Rather than depicting domestic experiences in real time, he combines archival photographs from the past with images of his present domestic activities. This approach produces a visual narrative that highlights negotiations in cultural hierarchies, power relations, and the temporal reconfiguration of masculinity.

During the interview, the participant's account did not begin with his current role as a stay-at-home father but with significant past experiences that he considered essential for contextualization. This narrative sequence corresponds with his visual strategy, as archival images from earlier phases of his life function as an entry point for understanding the negotiation of masculinity he is currently undergoing. Archival and contemporary domestic images are not treated as separate categories but are integrated within a single temporally structured narrative.

The archival photographs selected by the participant depict socially and symbolically dominant expressions of masculinity. In the past, he worked as a state official in a relatively strategic government position. Following a legal process that resulted in a multi-year prison sentence, he lost his employment. This experience significantly limited his future employment opportunities and ultimately contributed to his transition into the role of a stay-at-home father.

The images he described include archival photographs showing him interacting with public officials, being interviewed by the press, and appearing in family portraits with his children and first wife, as well as with children from his polygamous marriage. These images function as traces of a past associated with honor, authority, and social recognition. This phase represents a peak period shaped by dominant masculine values, including authority within the family, the subordination of women through

Figure 10. Temporal Narratives (H)



Source: Participant H personal archive

Figure 11. Temporal Narratives (H)



Source: Participant H personal archive

polygamous arrangements, and broader social legitimacy tied to economic and institutional success.

The participant now reflects on this period with a degree of critical distance. His imprisonment and subsequent loss of formal employment marked a important turning point, which he interprets as a form of personal reckoning for past actions.

After his release, participant H was employed in various jobs, including as an online driver, a warehouse worker in a restaurant and attempting to start a small business. But these attempts did not result in long-term stability. Under such conditions, domestic responsibilities became a central part of his everyday life, and the decision to become a stay-at-home father emerged as a practical choice within his changed family environment.

Figure 12. Temporal Narratives (H)



Source: Participant H, produced during the photo-elicitation process (2025)

In contrast to the archival images, which carry strong symbolic meaning, the domestic photographs he produced are presented as part of ordinary daily routines. He does not explicitly frame activities such as cleaning the floor, washing dishes, and maintaining the home as expressions of transformed masculinity. During the interview, participant H did not position domestic work as oppositional to traditional masculinity, but rather as a necessary aspect of his current life circumstances.

Participant H was actively looking for a job at the time of the interview photo-elicitation. This suggests his current identity as a stay-at-home father is not one that is permanent. Domestic masculinity is situational and transitional, situated between the memory of past identities and the anticipation of future social positioning.

His changing relationship with his children is also a reflection of the negotiation of masculinity, reflected in his visual and verbal narratives. Whereas masculinity was once associated with power and occasional violence, his current perspective emphasizes kindness, emotional control and patience in the home. While this negotiation is not always visually rendered explicitly, it is implicitly communicated in quotidian practices and narrative reflection.

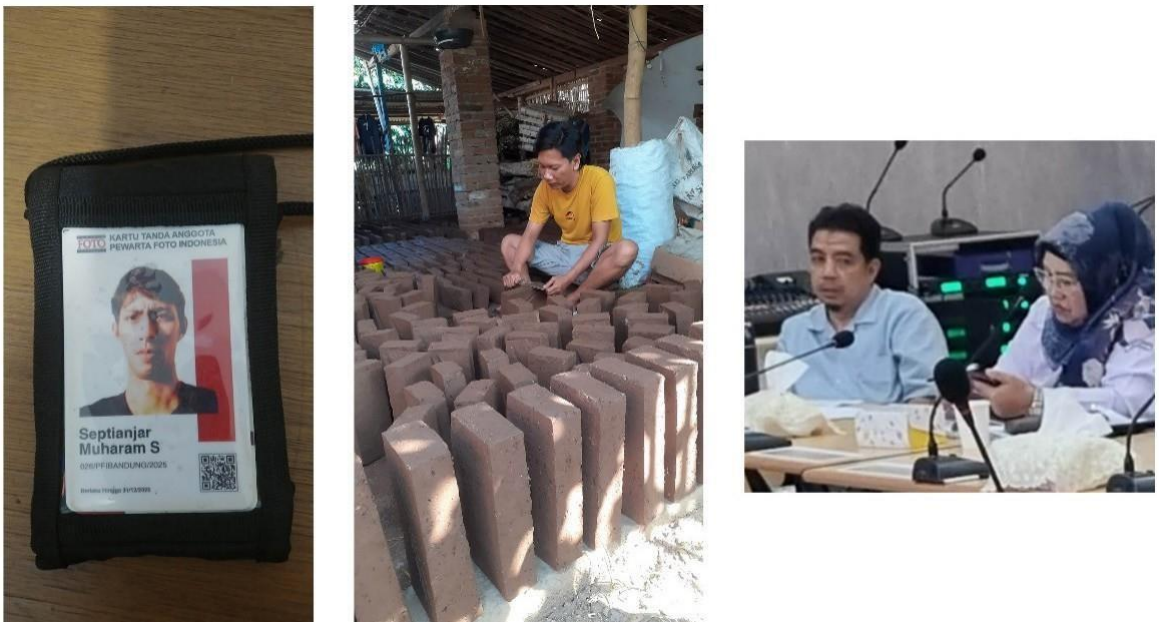
H's experience in this case shows that the construction of domestic masculinity does not necessarily derive from explicit ideological awareness. Instead, it may be the result of changing life situations, loss, and a reflective relationship with former masculine identities (Doucet, 2016; Tsang, 2024). The participant builds a visual narrative with archival and contemporary images that represents not only his role as a father in the household, but also a broader personal journey of negotiation and redefinition. The visual narrative in this section thus highlights domestic masculinity as a temporal phenomenon, generated by the tensions between past experiences and present realities, but open to future possibilities.

The role of the breadwinner and the legitimacy of masculinity

Alongside their domestic experiences, several participants also included images related to work in the public sphere. These images do not necessarily function as direct documentation of labor activities. Some participants presented representations of professional identity, such as press ID card (participant SM); others included archival images from their previous professional lives (participant MA); while some documented routine work situations (participant AS). Visually, these images share similarities with their domestic photographs, characterized by a direct snapshot, everyday quality with minimal aesthetic intervention.

The interviews clarified the significance of these images. Some participants explicitly stated that, despite their involvement in domestic labor and childcare, they still considered the role of provider central to masculine identity. Participant M, who occupied relatively secure professional and business positions, emphasized that financial provision and domestic participation should remain balanced. By contrast, participants experiencing unstable employment or economic uncertainty expressed greater tension regarding masculine legitimacy. Participant AS, for example, visualized himself searching for additional work opportunities alongside domestic responsibilities, while SM recalled being suspected by food vendors around his child's school of being unemployed because he regularly accompanied his child to school in the morning, a time culturally associated with men's paid work outside

Figure 13. Breadwinner Identity (SM, AS, MA)



Source: Left and center photograph by participant SM and participant AS, produced during the photo-elicitation process (2025); right: participant M personal archive

the home. Such accounts suggest that visible domestic presence itself may invite questions regarding masculine legitimacy.

In this context, work-related images and narratives can be read as strategies of social legitimation. In a culture that closely associates masculinity with economic provision, the inclusion of work-related imagery functions as a signifier that domestic involvement does not necessarily imply a loss of authority or a failure to meet normative masculine expectations. The masculinity of stay-at-home fathers is not constructed through a complete departure from conventional gender norms, but through a balancing strategy between caregiving and economic responsibility. These findings suggest that domestic involvement does not necessarily displace conventional masculinity, but rearticulates it within the domestic sphere through ongoing negotiations between care, authority, and provision.

Similar tensions have also been identified in other Muslim Asian contexts. Research in Pakistan shows that stay-at-home fathers often experience pressure to maintain masculine legitimacy through economic provision despite their domestic involvement (Shah, 2023), while studies in Malaysia suggest that caregiving may coexist with continuing claims to masculine authority and responsibility (Alatas, 2025). These dynamics resonate with the present findings, where domestic masculinity is negotiated through ongoing efforts to balance care, provision, and social recognition.

These findings indicate that the construction of masculinity among stay-at-home fathers remains marked by tensions between cash and care (Hobson & Morgan, 2004:10–11). Efforts to assert caregiving involvement coexist with attempts to sustain legitimacy as economic providers. This legitimacy is not always visually explicit, but often emerges through the narratives accompanying the images, highlighting the dialogical relationship between photographs and interviews. Even seemingly ordinary

images acquire meaning through the discursive contexts in which they are interpreted.

Conclusion

This study shows that domestic masculinity among stay-at-home fathers is not singular or fixed but emerges as a spectrum of visual practices shaped through everyday experiences and modes of representation. Through photo-elicitation, masculinity is articulated not only in domestic labor and father-child engagement but also in symbolic expressions and moments of visual absence, indicating that identity is constructed as much through selection and framing as through practice itself.

Photography functions as a reflective medium through which participants negotiate masculinity within the boundaries of gender norms, family dynamics, and privacy. Domestic involvement remains closely tied to expectations of men as breadwinners, suggesting that changes in masculinity tend to occur through ongoing negotiation rather than structural transformation. In this sense, the study contributes to discussions on domestic masculinity by showing how caregiving, provision, authority, and representation coexist in complex and sometimes contradictory ways within the home.

The findings also demonstrate that domestic participation does not necessarily displace hegemonic masculinity, but may rearticulate it through symbolic markers of strength, responsibility, protection, and legitimacy. The home therefore emerges not merely as a site of caregiving, but as a contested representational space in which masculine identity is continuously negotiated through visibility, domestic participation, and self-presentation.

At the methodological level, the study highlights several limitations of photo-elicitation. Participants approached photography in different ways depending on their familiarity with visual expression, personal experiences, and comfort in representing domestic life. Some participants employed symbolic or metaphorical imagery, while others preferred direct, minimal, or selective forms of representation, including visual absence. These differences do not indicate unequal value in representation, but rather reflect diverse ways of articulating domestic experiences and masculine identity through visual media. The findings also indicate the importance of attending not only to what is shown visually, but also to absence, discomfort, selective framing, and non-representation in studies of gender and visuality.

These findings resonate with Pitcher and Boonzaier's (2023) discussion of "hyper-invisibility" and visual scrutiny in photo-narrative research, which suggests that participants may strategically negotiate visibility and self-representation in response to anticipated social judgment and audience interpretation. Similarly, in our study, selective framing, symbolic imagery, and visual absence similarly indicate that photographs do not function as transparent reflections of experience, but as negotiated representations shaped by concerns surrounding masculinity, legitimacy, privacy, and social perception.

Practically, these findings may contribute to broader discussions on fatherhood and caregiving policies in Indonesia by highlighting the complexity of men's domestic participation beyond normative breadwinner expectations. Future studies may further focus on specific dimensions of domestic masculinity, particularly the intersections of class, religion, and employment arrangements, in order to examine more closely how

different social contexts shape men's negotiations of caregiving, provision, and masculine legitimacy in everyday family life. Further research may also explore how visual practices influence the ways domestic experiences and gender roles are represented, negotiated, or obscured within family settings.

Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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