



Social Support and Parental Stress Among First-time Mother

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Highlights

- Research on social support and parental stress on mothers is still limited.
- There is research showing that social support has no relationship with parental stress in mothers.
- There is a negative relationship between social support and parental stress in first-time mothers.

Abstract

Background: Being a mother is difficult because caring for the child is one of her responsibilities. When caring for children, mothers continue to do household chores in daily activities. Suppose the mother needs social support from people around her while carrying out her responsibilities. In that case, the mother will experience parental stress because she feels unloved and valued, so she cannot carry out her duties. **The study aims:** to find out the relationship between social support and parental stress in first-time mothers. **Method:** This research is a quantitative study with a correlational design and using a non-probability sampling technique. The study involved 110 first-time mothers aged 20-40. The measuring instruments used are the Social Provisions Scale (SPS) with the total items used in this study were 19 items ($\alpha = 0.98$) and Parental Stress Scale (PSS) with total items used in this study were 14 items ($\alpha = 0.913$). **Result:** Spearman correlation test results obtained values of $r = -0.474$ and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), which showed a significant negative relationship between social support and parental stress in first-time mothers. It means that the higher the social support it has, the lower the parental stress experienced by first-time mothers or vice versa. **Conclusion:** Most of the participants in this study had high social support and low parental stress.

Keywords: First-Time Mother; Social Support; Parental Stress

INTRODUCTION

Becoming a mother for the first time is a significant change in their life because they have new roles and responsibilities, so it becomes a new challenge for them to adjust to these changes (Javadifar, Majlesi, Nikbakht, Nedjat, & Montazeri, 2016). One of the new responsibilities after being a mother is caring for children, where mothers have greater involvement in parenting than fathers (Schoppe-Sullivan, Kotila, Jia, Lang & Bower, 2013). It is because fathers focus on their role as providers of the family economy. Hence, fathers raise their children indirectly through their substitute, usually the mother (Townsend, in Raley, Bianchi, & Wang, 2012). In addition, fathers also consider that parenting is the mother's primary responsibility, so fathers usually help mothers in parenting when the mother cannot care for the child for a while (Rakotomanana, Walters, Komakech, Hildebrand, Gates, Thomas, Fawbush, & Stoecker, 2021).

Then many things experienced mothers caring for children, such as feeding, cleaning, or looking after children; even in caring for children, mothers still do household chores in their daily activities (Rakotomanana et al., 2021). Therefore, mothers are responsible for caring for the family and have bigger household chores than fathers (Ruppanner, Perales, & Baxter, 2018). In addition, first-time mothers are optimistic that they can care for their children well (Harwood, McLean, & Durkin, 2007). However, some mothers realize that their expectations sometimes do not match their conditions, so they feel unprepared and overwhelmed in their new role as mothers, which causes them to feel insecure in parenting (Lazarus & Rossouw, 2015; Palsson, Kvist, Ekelin, Hallstrom, & Persson, 2018). It can cause parental stress in first-time mothers (Kristensen, Simonsen, Trillingsgaard, Pontoppidan, & Kronborg, 2018).

Based on the results of pre-research interviews and surveys conducted on 12 first-time mothers with children in the age range of 2 months-5 years, it was found that there were various parenting challenges they had to face, such as time management in taking care of children and husbands, disrupted sleep patterns, feeling inadequate in parenting, lack of information regarding parenting and conditions that occur in children, and having to be patient and put aside ego when children are fussy or refuse to eat. The challenges faced by these mothers have various impacts on the mother. Eight mothers feel more sensitive, angry, anxious, and afraid when faced with the child's condition while caring, like a fussy child when a mother is tired from her activities. However, they feel happy being able to care for and see their child's development, while the other four mothers also stated that they feel pleased with parenting. In addition, nine mothers stated that they experienced stress due to the challenges faced when raising children, and some even felt that the cause of the stress they experienced was also due to interference from parents regarding the care of their grandchildren, causing a mismatch in parenting styles between mother and grandparents.

Based on research conducted by Putri, Rahayu, and Khasanah (2021) shows that as many as 64.10% of 78 mothers in Cianjur experience parental stress. It was found in the initial phenomenon found in the study, namely, mothers usually have their daily tasks. However, since the existence of distance learning, they have additional tasks related to their children's learning because their children are in the age range of 6-8 years, and children at that age cannot learn independently. Mothers cannot always fully accompany the learning process because, in school, children or mothers have routine tasks that must be done. Mothers cannot understand children's needs and difficulties. Besides that, research conducted by Fatwikiningsih and Fajriyah (2021) on 92 mothers in Gresik regarding parenting stress showed that 14% of mothers experienced high stress, 55% moderate stress, and 30% low stress. It is because the COVID-19 pandemic has forced parents aged 2-6 to spend time with their children and develop parent-child relationships.

However, children aged 2-6 years are in a period where they explore and demand freedom, so they will show stubborn, stubborn, disobedient, rebellious behavior and often get angry for no reason. Those behaviors are challenging for parents to take care of their children, so they risk experiencing parental stress.

The stress experienced by mothers as a result of parenting can have negative impacts, such as causing the use of abusive or ineffective parenting methods; even when it reaches the highest level of stress, it can cause neglect and violence in children (McQuillan & Bates, 2017). It is supported by research conducted by Bauch, Hefti, Oeltjen, Pérez, Swenson, Fürstenau, Rhiner, & Schmid (2022), who found that parental stress is a predictor that causes neglect in parenting due to the emergence of negative perceptions in parents regarding the parenting role and the emergence of aversive feelings in them. In addition, research conducted by Crum and Moreland (2017) found that parental stress has a positive relationship with child violence. Parental stress can also harm the health and psychological well-being of parents. It is similar to research conducted by Muniroh (2022), which found a positive relationship between parental stress and the psychological well-being of working mothers. Then parental stress also affects the child's temperament, which is influenced by the relationship between parents and children.

According to Berry and Jones (1995), parental stress is stress experienced by parents related to their role in caring for and developing close relationships with their children. Parental stress is influenced by several factors, such as the child's condition, general living conditions, social support, family functioning, material resources, daily hassles in raising children, feelings of incompetence in parenting, interparental conflict, and role overload (Gunarsa, 2006; McQuillan & Bates, 2017). Based on research by Skreden, Skari, Malt, Pripp, Björk, Faugli, and Emblem (2012), mothers experience higher parental stress than fathers because mothers do housework and care for children twice more than fathers. Research conducted by Widarsson, Engstrom, Rosenblad, and Kerstis (2012) also found that mothers experience higher parental stress than fathers because mothers feel that their time and opportunities to do their hobbies are limited by their greater responsibility in taking care of children and home than fathers.

In reducing this stress, mothers usually do several ways to deal with it, such as me time (for example, going for a walk at the mall with friends or alone and getting treatments at the salon), praying, or listening to music. In addition, another way that can be used by mothers in dealing with stress due to parenting is to seek support or social support from those closest to them. Social support is an interpersonal relationship in which individuals receive help from other people directly to feel supported (Weiss, in Cutrona, 1987). According to Uchino (in Sarafino & Smith, 2011), social support refers to providing a feeling of comfort, care, respect, or assistance to a person or a group. Social support is usually provided by family, friends, spouses, doctors, or the community (Sarafino, 2011). In addition, according to Sarafino (2011), people who receive social support believe they are loved and valued by those who provide them with social support.

Social support can help mothers reduce the stress experienced due to parenting to improve their health and well-being and make mothers feel positive emotions (Taylor, in Machado, Chur-Hansen, & Due, 2020; Zhao, Fu, & Ai, 2020). One of the providers of social support to mothers is their partners; when their husbands can help mothers in raising children directly, praising mothers regarding handling childcare problems or giving love and encouragement can increase affective feelings in mothers (Williamson, McCabe, O'Hara, Hart, LaPlante, & King, 2013). Then, one of the social supports that mothers need the most is companionship, where mothers feel that their husbands are always by their side when they experience difficult times while carrying out their role as mothers (Yunisah, Amalia, Akram, Moeliono, & Abidin, 2022).

Research conducted by Swanson and Hannula (2021) on mothers in Finland and England found that mothers usually get social support from doctors and their closest family to reduce parental stress. The social support that mothers usually receive and like are informational, emotional, and instrumental support, such as worrying about the child from husbands, friends, doctors, or fellow mothers (Williamson et al., 2013; Machado et al., 2020; Swanson & Hannula, 2021; Huang, Lee, Lin, & Duan, 2022). Research conducted by Huang et al. (2022) on first-time mothers in Taiwan also found that social support received by mothers is usually such as emotional support and praise from the mother's partner and parents so that it can reduce parental stress experienced by mothers with the most effective social support is in the form of praise.

Research conducted by Park and Lee (2022) on mothers who have children with disabilities found that there is a negative relationship between social support and parental stress and depression because social support is a source of coping stress which can weaken the harmful effects of parental stress, namely depression. The results of other studies also show a negative relationship between social support and parental stress (Purnomo & Kristiana, 2016; Olianda & Rizal, 2020; Song, Park, Lee, Park, & Kim, 2020; Riany & Ihsana, 2021). However, research conducted by Pearson and Chan (1993) found that there is no relationship between social support and parental stress in mothers of children with learning disabilities in China.

Based on the description above, social support has an important role and relationship to parental stress experienced by first-time mothers. When mothers receive social support from the people around them, it can help them feel loved, valued, and cared for by people around when they are busy and stressed with parenting, so their well-being and health can also increase, and it has a positive impact on a child's development. However, there are research differences between this study and previous studies, where previous research conducted research with the aim of the research being mothers who had children with disabilities and also examination that had contra results, so this became a gap in the existing problems because the target of this study was a first-time mother. Then, the lack of research related to the two variables on the target group that the researcher wants to study makes the researcher interested to find out whether there is a relationship between social support and parental stress in first-time mothers.

METHOD

Study design

This research is a correlational study with a quantitative design and a sampling method using incidental sampling. Data was collected using a Google form from 18 January 2023 to 13 February 2023.

Participant

Participants in this study involved 110 first-time mothers aged 20-40 throughout Indonesia. The characteristics of participants in this study were first-time mothers who had only one child aged 0 months-6 years, had married status, and had an age range of 20-40 years. The reason for choosing this criterion is because the age of 0-6 years is the golden age of the child. Child in that age range will experience rapid growth and development and also has developmental tasks that must be completed, so the mother's role in parenting is very significant (Early, 2012; Soetjiningsih, 2012). In addition, the relationship between husband and wife has an effect on the stressed parents, and the husband plays an important role as the main supporter of the wife when experiencing parental stress (Dong, Dong, Chen, & Yang, 2022; Benza & Liamputtong, in Machado, et al., 2020), Then, ages 20-40 are early adults, at that age there is a new phase of

parenthood and some people in early adulthood have planned and arranged to act as good parents. However, being a parent requires interpersonal abilities and emotional demands that have never been studied before (Santrock, 2011). Participants who meet the criteria will be used as samples, so this study uses a non-probability sampling technique, and participants will be selected using an incidental sampling technique.

Instruments

Data were collected using two scales; the first is Social Provisions Scale (SPS) scale developed by Cutrona and Russell (1987) and adapted into Indonesian by the researchers; then, the items were reviewed by expert judgment, the supervisor. SPS initially had 24 items tested by the author using an online questionnaire and distributed to 31 mothers who had two children. Then, data was processed, and it was found that seven items did not pass the selection. After that, the author revised the seven items and was reviewed again by the expert judgment, and the data collection began, but after the data was collected and processed, five items did not pass the selection. Therefore, the total SPS items used in this study were 19 items with a total correlation item correction score range was 0.369 – 0.806 and a level of reliability of 0.98, while the original version of this scale has a total of 20 items with a total correlation corrected item score range of 0.653 – 0.730 and a reliability level of 0.915. Then the other scale used is the Parental Stress Scale (PSS), developed by Berry and Jones (1995) and adapted into Indonesian by Kumalasari, Gani, and Fourianalistyawati (2022) with total items used in this study were 14 items that passed the selection because the total correlation item correction score range was 0.341 – 0.746 and had a reliability level of 0.913. In contrast, the original version of this scale has a total of 15 items with a convergent validity test of 0.98 (pleasure dimension) and 0.97 (strain dimension), with discriminant validity of 0.89 (pleasure dimension) and 0.85 (strain dimension), and has a reliability level of 0.828.

Procedure

Researchers spread posters about research participants through social media, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Individuals who match the participant criteria can directly access the questionnaire link listed in the poster. When data has been collected, the researcher processes the data, starting from conducting normality tests and linearity tests to hypothesis tests and drawing conclusions on the results of the study based on tests that have been carried out.

Data Analysis

The data analysis performed was the normality test, linearity test, and hypothesis testing using IBM SPSS version 26.0.

RESULT

Participant's characteristics

Participants in this study involved 110 first-time mothers (mean age = 29 years, SD = 5.35). From demographic data, it is known that most of the participants came from Nusa Tenggara & Bali (44.6%), had a marriage age of 1 year (21.8%) and two years (21.8%), had sons (53.6%) and aged range of the child is 0-6 months (21.6%), last education held was bachelor degree (56.4%), worked as a housewife (29.1%), and parenting help from husband (52.7%).

Data analysis

Descriptive Analysis

a. Social Support

The results of the categorization of participant data for the social support variable showed (see Table 1) that most of the participants in this study felt social support in the high category (66.4%), participants who felt social support in the moderate category were 31.8%, and 1.8% of participants felt social support in the low category with a mean social support score of 47.5 and a standard deviation of 9.5. Therefore, it can be concluded that most first-time mothers in this study had high social support.

Table 1.

Social Support

Intervals	Category	Frequency	Percentage
$19 \leq X \leq 38$	Low	2	1.8%
$38 \leq X \leq 57$	Moderate	35	31.8%
$57 \leq X \leq 76$	High	73	66.4%
Total		110	100%
Mean: 47.5; Standard Deviation: 9.5			

b. Parental Stress

The results of the categorization of participant data for the parental stress variable showed (see Table 2) that most of the participants in this study felt parental stress in the low category (90.9%), participants who felt parental stress in the moderate category of 8.2% and 0.9% of participants felt parental stress in the high category with a mean parental stress score of 42 and a standard deviation of 9.3. Therefore, it can be concluded that most first-time mothers in this study had low parental stress.

Table 2.

Parental Stress

Intervals	Category	Frequency	Percentage
$14 \leq X \leq 32.7$	Low	100	90.9%
$32.7 \leq X \leq 51.3$	Moderate	9	8.2%
$51.3 \leq X \leq 70$	High	1	0.9%
Total		110	100%
Mean: 42; Standard Deviation: 9.3			

Hypothesis testing

Non-parametric hypothesis testing in this study uses the Spearman test because the assumption test is not met, showing (see Table 3) the results of $r = -0.474$ with a significance value is 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), which means that there is a significant negative relationship with a sufficient degree of correlation between social support and parental stress in first-time mothers. The higher the social support a first-time mother has, the lower the parental stress experienced by first-time mothers or vice versa.

Table 3.*Hypothesis Test Results*

Variable	Spearman Correlation	Sig. (1-tailed)
<i>Social support</i>	-0.474	0.000
<i>Parental stress</i>	-0.474	0.000

DISCUSSION

This study aims to find out the relationship between social support and parental stress in first-time mothers. Based on the result, it was found that there is a significant negative relationship between social support and parental stress in first-time mothers. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted in this study. The results of this hypothesis test are similar to research conducted by Azni and Nugraha (2017), who found that there was a negative relationship between social support and parental stress; that is, the higher the social support, the lower the parental stress experienced by mothers who have children in the SLB-C Z Bandung. On the contrary, the lower the social support, the higher the parental stress experienced by mothers with children in the SLB-C Z Bandung. Other research conducted by Abd El-Aziz, Ibrahim, and Abdullah (2022) shows that there is a significant negative relationship between social support and parental stress; that is, the higher the social support, the lower the parental stress experienced by mothers who have children with disabilities or the lower social support they have, the higher the parental stress experienced by mothers who have children with disabilities.

Social support is a source of support received by individuals who act as a buffer against stress experienced by individuals resulting from a difficult situation (Zimet et al., In Rahmayanti, Rahmania, Anisa, & Nashori, 2022). Social support is usually provided by family, friends, couples, doctors, or even the community (Sarafino, 2011). In addition, social support is one source of coping stress strategies, so when mothers face stressful situations while caring for their child, she needs help from the surrounding people to find the right coping stress strategy to get through the situation (Ren, Li, Chen, Chen, & Nie, 2020; Park & Lee, 2022). Then, the social support they receive will make the mother feel loved and valued by those around her so that the parental stress experienced by the mother can be reduced (Sarafino, 2011). In addition, when mothers get support and feel these positive emotions, they will feel that the people around them understand them. Finally, the mother can feel comfortable, capable, and optimistic about changing roles and new assignments as a mother in parenting (Hanifah & Rozali, 2021).

It is similar to research conducted by Zhao, Fu, and Ai (2020), who found that social support can reduce parental stress and help mothers to feel positive emotions; with the support they receive, they can overcome the stress experienced and increase their resilience. It is because when mothers receive social support, mothers will believe that social will give them a feeling of love, care, or a sense of value bound to a social group, and the mother will consistently improve her psychological health to protect herself from stress. However, if the mother has low social support, she will feel unloved and unvalued by those around her. It will increase the parental stress experienced by the mother due to the limitations and burdens the mother owns regarding parenting and the lack of social support received (Wachtel & Carter, in Pisula & Porębowicz-Dörsmann, 2017). Lack of social support and increased parental stress can cause the quality of life of mothers to be low (Webster et al., in Machado et al., 2020).

In parenting, mothers have many tasks, such as feeding, cleaning, or looking after children; even in caring for children, mothers continue to do housework in daily activities

(Rakotomanana et al., 2021). In addition, first-time mothers are optimistic about taking good care of their children (Harwood, McLean, & Durkin, 2007). However, some mothers realize that their expectations sometimes do not fit their conditions, so they feel unprepared and overwhelmed in their new role as mothers, which causes their insecurity in parenting (Lazarus & Rossouw, 2015; Palsson et al., 2018). It can cause parental stress in first-time mothers (Kristensen et al., 2018). Therefore, mothers need to receive social support, especially from husbands, because the support given by the husband is like helping the mother in caring for the child directly; praising the mother in dealing with childcare issues or giving love and enthusiasm can increase affective feelings for the mother (Williamson et al., 2013). Besides that, the social support given by the husband can also make the mother see the stressful situation when caring becomes a situation that is not stressful so that the mother hopes that when they experience difficulties, their husband can help them (Sarafino, in Savitri & Herdajani, 2023). Apart from the husband, family members such as parents or siblings and also friends of the mother also have an important role in giving social support to the mother when experiencing parental stress. It is similar to research conducted by Negron, Martin, Almog, Balbierz, and Howell (2014), who find that family and friends provide support such as tangible help and emotional support that mothers need so the mother can achieve physical and emotional well-being because the mother can adapt and face heavy tasks that cause stress after having children.

In this study, it was found that as many as 73 participants (66.4%) had high social support, where participants felt they had received social support, such as advice, appreciation, feelings of being part of a group, feeling safe and close, feeling needed by others, and tangible help from her husband, family, and friends. Then, 35 participants (31.8%) had sufficient social support and felt they still needed to receive it fully. As many as 2 participants (1.8%) felt they had low social support. Furthermore, as many as 100 participants (90.9%) had low parental stress, where the participants felt happy, loved, and felt themselves developing while acting as parents in parenting. Then, 9 participants (8.2%) had moderate parental stress, which meant that the participants felt that parenting was a heavy burden and affected energy, time, and cost. There was 1 participant (0.9%) who had high parental stress, where the participant feels that parenting is a heavy burden and affects energy, time, and the cost of caring so that it can cause conflict with herself.

In general, the results of this study raise the implication that reducing parental stress experienced by first-time mothers can be done by providing social support such as advice, appreciation, feelings of belonging to a group, feelings of security and familiarity, feelings of being needed by others, and tangible help from her husband, family, and friends. With social support, these new mothers can adapt and overcome stressful situations so that they can have good physical and emotional well-being. This study had several limitations, such as the number of participants did not fully describe the actual situation experienced by first-time mothers; the study subjects only focused on married mothers, and the possibility of bias or faking good by the participants when filling out the questionnaire. In addition, further researchers can consider researching the father's parenting because, in this era, many fathers have taken part in the role of parents to care for children.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research that has been done, it was found that there is a significant relationship between social support and parental stress in first-time mothers, where the higher the social support, the lower the parental stress experienced by first-time mothers or vice versa. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted in this study.

Most of the participants in this study had high social support and low parental stress. It shows that most of the participants in this study felt they had received social support in the form of advice, appreciation, a feeling of being part of a group, a feeling of security and familiarity, a feeling of being needed by others, as well as tangible help from their husbands, family, and friends.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researchers declare no conflict of interest.

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