

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PARENTING STRESS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic is a phenomenon that mental health scholars have not fully understood, which might adversely affect parenting. Previous studies have found that sociodemographic factors influence parenting stress in non-pandemic conditions. However, no study has discussed parenting stress during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the present study investigates the sociodemographic factors influencing parenting stress during the Covid-19 pandemic. Using a cross-sectional approach, we applied convenience sampling using online platforms to recruit the participants. Seven hundred ninety parents aged 20-57 participated in this study (mothers = 740, fathers = 50). The validated Indonesian version of the Parenting Stress Scale was administered online to measure parenting stress. The results identified that mothers experienced parenting stress more than fathers ($t(788) = -2.83$; $p = 0.005$; $d = -3.28$; 95% CI [-5.55; -1.00]). Furthermore, it revealed that financial condition was the only predictor of the parenting stress experienced by fathers ($\beta = 0.39$, $p = 0.02$). Apart from the financial condition, working status ($\beta = -0.08$, $p = 0.04$), educational background ($\beta = -0.10$, $p = 0.02$), and marital status ($\beta = 0.13$, $p = 0.00$) also predicted the level of parenting stress in mothers. Several sociodemographic variables associated with maternal parenting stress indicate the necessity of interventions to promote mothers' mental health, who are more prone to parenting stress than fathers.

Keywords: parenting stress, Covid-19, sociodemographics, fathers, mothers

Faktor Sosiodemografi yang Berhubungan dengan Stres Pengasuhan pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19

Abstrak

Pandemi Covid-19 merupakan fenomena yang berpotensi untuk memperburuk stress pengasuhan, sehingga memunculkan pertanyaan mengenai faktor sosiodemografik yang berhubungan dengan stress pengasuhan. Namun, sejauh pengamatan peneliti, belum ada studi yang membahas stress pengasuhan di situasi pandemi Covid-19. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti faktor-faktor sosiodemografi yang berpengaruh terhadap stress pengasuhan selama pandemi Covid-19. Menggunakan pendekatan *cross-sectional*, contoh penelitian dijamin menggunakan metode *convenience sampling* melalui media *online*. Tujuh ratus sembilan puluh orang tua berusia 20-57 tahun menjadi partisipan dalam penelitian ini (ibu = 740, ayah = 50). *Parenting Stress Scale* versi Bahasa Indonesia yang telah tervalidasi diberikan dalam bentuk kuesioner *online*. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa ibu mengalami stress pengasuhan yang lebih tinggi dibandingkan ayah ($t(788) = -2.83$; $p = 0.005$; $d = -3.28$; 95% CI [-5.55; -1.00]). Kondisi keuangan merupakan prediktor stress pengasuhan yang dialami ayah ($\beta = 0.39$, $p = 0.02$). Selain kondisi keuangan, status pekerjaan ($\beta = -0.08$, $p = 0.04$), latar belakang pendidikan ($\beta = -0.10$, $p = 0.02$), dan status pernikahan ($\beta = 0.13$, $p = 0.00$) juga menjadi prediktor stress pengasuhan pada ibu. Banyaknya faktor yang berhubungan dengan stress pengasuhan pada ibu menunjukkan adanya kebutuhan untuk menyusun intervensi untuk menjaga kesehatan mental ibu yang cenderung lebih rentan mengalami stress pengasuhan dibanding ayah.

Kata kunci: ayah, Covid-19, ibu, stress pengasuhan, sosiodemografi

INTRODUCTION

Parenting stress is a psychological response that parents may experience as they engage in the parental role and is frequently perceived as a negative or aversive response to parental obligations (Crnic & Low, 2002; Holly et al., 2019). Parenting stress also refers to the type of stress parents experience in raising children (Kochanova et al., 2022). It occurs when resources to fulfill the demands are insufficient (Deater-Deckard, 1998). There is a conceptual distinction between parenting stress and other types of stress experienced by parents, such as financial hardship, work stress, or negative life events, although stress associated with the parental role and other life stressors is frequently related (Holly et al., 2019).

Research suggests the impact of parenting stress on parents, children, and the parent-child relationship. Specifically for parents, parenting stress is associated with a low level of acceptance and high level of psychological control (Putnick et al., 2008), less positive parenting beliefs regarding the importance of parenting behaviors (Respler-Herman et al., 2012), harsh parenting, reduced parent-child relationship closeness (G. Chung et al., 2022), and maternal warmth (Chen, 2020). The stress is also related to greater authoritarian and permissive parenting styles (Hutchison et al., 2016). Because parenting stress diminishes parents' sense of mastery, it could lead to depression (Farmer & Lee, 2011). In addition, many parents consider raising children one of the most meaningful aspects of their lives (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990). Therefore, parenting stress is negatively associated with life satisfaction (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990) and parent well-being (Sharda, 2022). The effect of parenting stress on children includes behavioral and emotional problems. Furthermore, it predicts internalization and externalization behavioral problems (Liu & Wang, 2015). Parenting stress also affects the healthy functioning of the family (Streisand et al., 2003) and the quality of relationships between parents and children (Li et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2020).

The negative impact of stress experienced by parents on the parent themselves, their children, and their relationship has become an urgent issue that encourages studies to examine its influencing factors. Previous studies have revealed various factors correlated with the level of parenting stress. For example, Huizink et al. (2017) found that the parental factors related to parenting stress include parents' personalities and mental health. In addition, a study by Moe et

al. (2018) found that mothers' adverse childhood experiences predicted postnatal parenting stress. As for the child factors, McQuillan & Bates (2017) reported the infant's temperament and behavior contribute to parenting stress. A previous study during the Covid-19 pandemic in Germany found that parental perceived stress was higher in parents of older children than in younger ones (Dillmann et al., 2022). Furthermore, social contexts such as a conflict between work issues and the demand for child upbringing (Schieman et al., 2009) and adaptation to the parental role (Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011) contribute to the experience of parenting stress. Moreover, demographic factors, such as gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, social class, and education, influence parenting stress (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2017), despite inconclusive findings (Lawson et al., 2020; Spinelli et al., 2020). All the research results mentioned earlier are from before the pandemic period.

A study involving 59 countries reported that the Covid-19 pandemic has robustly affected global mental health (Alzueta et al., 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic, as one of the huge external events, may put the negative impact of parenting stress under the spotlight (Brown et al., 2020; Lawson et al., 2020). The pandemic creates unprecedented challenges to many dimensions of parents' and children's lives. Economic conditions, physical and mental health challenges, education methods, and work-life balance may exacerbate parenting stress (Ahzani & Agustini, 2021; Cuartas, 2020; Griffith, 2020; Humphreys et al., 2020).

A survey by Save The Children provided evidence of the increasing level of parental stress (Ritz et al., 2020). During the first four weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic, parental stress levels increased significantly to 83.2%. This number increased to 95.1% in the 17th-19th week (Christy, 2020). In Indonesia, 75.34% of 223 parents experience moderate levels of parental stress, and 10.31% experience severe levels of parental stress in the first three weeks of implementing the social distancing policy (Susilowati & Azzasyofia, 2020).

The increasing parental stress during the Covid-19 pandemic indicates the need to increase resources and support for mental health. Several factors that affected parenting stress during Covid-19 were changing children's routines, worries about Covid-19, and online schooling issues (Adams et al., 2021). The investigation by Spinelli and colleagues (2020) revealed that parents who experienced parenting stress did

not enjoy their time with their children despite having much time together during the lockdown. Amalia and colleagues (2022) also revealed that in the Covid-19 pandemic situations, the effect of parenting stress on positive parenting is worse when the parents have difficulty getting resources for their family.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a phenomenon that mental health scholars have not fully understood. It raises questions about the demographic factor influencing parenting stress during this unprecedented time since studies investigating this issue is yet scarce, especially in the Indonesian population. Various demographic groups tend to encounter particular challenges in coping with the situation. The result of this study will shed light on the characteristics of the demographic group most vulnerable to parenting stress. Also, understanding the factors would help policymaking and mental health professionals address the issue experienced by the groups. Previous studies have found that sociodemographic factors influence parenting stress in non-pandemic conditions. However, as far as we are concerned, no study has discussed parenting stress during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is necessary to examine further the demographic factors that affect parenting stress during this unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the present study investigates the demographic factors associated with parenting stress during the Covid-19 pandemic. We hypothesized that age, gender (male/female), age, education, marital status (married/single parents), number of children, and age of the oldest child and the youngest child would correlate with parenting stress experienced by fathers and mothers.

METHODS

This study applied a cross-sectional quantitative approach to investigate the demographic factors associated with parenting stress during the Covid-19 pandemic. The ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethical Committee of Universitas Padjadjaran (Number 791/UN6.KEP/EC/2021). The study was conducted from September – November 2021.

The research used a convenience sampling method to recruit the participants. The information about the study was spread through social media (Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp groups), along with the survey link. Anyone in Indonesia who has children could participate in this study. After filling out the informed consent, the potential participants could access the survey link. The time needed to complete the survey is approximately 15 minutes.

The demographics data collected consist of age, gender (male/female), education, marital status (married/ single parents), number of children, and age of the oldest and youngest child.

Parenting stress was measured by the Parental Stress Scale (Berry & Jones, 1995). We used the validated 17 items of the Indonesian version (Amalia et al., 2022). The following is an example of the item, "Caring for my child(ren) sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give." Participants were responded to by the 5-Likert Scale (from strongly disagree=1 to strongly agree=5). The reliability (Cronbach α) in the present sample is 0.825. The total score indicated the level of parenting stress. Total scores range from 17 to 85, with a score of 85 indicating the highest parenting stress level.

In the instructions section, we illustrate the pandemic conditions that were faced at that time. Respondents were asked to fill in mindfully according to the actual situation they were experiencing during the Covid-19 pandemic. We include one manipulation check item in the survey to anticipate negligence in online data collection. The item statement is: "For this number, choose option 3." Participants who did not choose option three on this item can be assumed to have not filled out the survey carefully. Consequently, the data given by those participants are excluded and not processed further.

The demographic characteristics of participants are presented by number and percentage. The score of parenting stress is presented by its mean and standard deviation. Next, the correlation between variables was conducted using Pearson correlation for two continuous variables and nonparametric correlations for categorical variables. The differences between subgroups were conducted using t-tests and one-way ANOVA. Last, we conducted multiple linear regression where parenting stress served as the outcome, and demographic factors served as predictors. We used the IBM SPSS Statistics version 22 to conduct all of the analysis.

RESULT

Demographics Characteristic

The study involved 790 participants, mostly mothers (n=740; 93.7%). Generally, the participants' age range is 20-57 (mean=34.38; SD=7.03). The mothers' age ranged between 20-54 (mean=33.68; SD=6.46), while the fathers' age ranged between 28-57 (mean=44.76; SD=7.00). The number of children was between 1 and 7 (mean=2.06; SD=1.01).

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of participants and descriptive statistics of parenting stress

Demographic Characteristics		Total Subject (N)	Percentage (%)	Parenting Stress	
				Mean	SD
Gender	Male/ Father	50	6.3	29.42	8.35
	Female/ Mother	740	93.7	32.70	7.91
Working status	Unemployment	319	40.4	33.48	7.84
	Part-time	214	27.1	31.90	8.21
	Fulltime	257	32.5	31.75	7.85
Education	Elementary	4	0.5	32.00	4.24
	Junior High School	8	1.0	33.13	8.20
	Senior High School	129	16.3	31.52	7.59
	Diploma	82	10.4	32.50	7.57
	Undergraduate	420	53.2	32.20	7.82
	Postgraduate	147	18.6	34.13	8.85
Financial Condition	Need help	6	0.8	39.00	14.86
	Barely enough	86	10.9	33.64	8.07
	Enough for living expenses	253	32.0	33.07	8.19
	Enough to save	445	56.3	31.85	7.65
Marital Status	Single parent	148	18.7	30.94	6.56
	Married	642	81.3	32.85	8.23

Note. SD = Standard Deviation

The participants' oldest child aged from 1 month to 31 years old, and the age of the participants' youngest child ranged from 1 month to 21 years old. Table 1 shows the demographic description of the respondents and the parenting stress scores between subgroups. In terms of gender, mothers experienced higher stress levels than fathers ($t(788) = -2.83$; $p = 0.005$; $d = -3.28$; 95% CI [-5.55; -1.00]). Regarding the working status, unemployed participants tended to experience more stress than those who had a full-time job ($F(2,787) = 4.27$; $p = 0.016$; $d = 1.73$; $p = 0.03$; 95% CI [0.17; 3.29]). Regarding marital status, married participants experienced more stress than single parents ($t(788) = -2.64$; $p = 0.009$; $d = -1.91$; 95% CI [-3.33; -0.49]). Participants with different educational backgrounds and financial conditions tended to have the same level of parenting stress.

Demographic Predictors of Parenting Stress

The multivariate analysis presented in Table 2 shows that not all demographic characteristics predict parenting stress among fathers and mothers.

The results indicate that financial condition was the only predictor of the parenting stress experienced by fathers. The more stable the financial condition is, the lower the stress. On the other hand, working status, educational background, and marital status predicted the level of parenting stress in mothers, apart from the financial condition. The more occupied mothers are by professional work, the lower the parenting stress. Like fathers, the more stable

the mother's financial condition is, the lower the stress. On the contrary, having a spouse and higher education predicted higher maternal stress.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigates the demographic factor associated with stress experienced by parents during the Covid-19 pandemic. The most obvious finding from the analysis is that mothers experienced parenting stress more than fathers.

Table 2 Multivariate analysis for father and mother

Variable	Father		Mother	
	β	p	B	P
(Constant)				
Age	-0.18	0.41	0.04	0.54
Working status ^a	-0.14	0.39	-0.08	0.04
Educational background ^b	0.07	0.65	0.10	0.02
Financial condition ^c	-0.39	0.02	-0.13	0.00
Marital status ^d	-0.08	0.63	0.13	0.00
Number of children	-0.09	0.56	0.03	0.60
Age of youngest child	0.07	0.77	-0.09	0.11

Note: ^aUnemployment = 1, part-time = 2, full-time = 3. ^bElementary = 1, junior high school = 2, senior high school = 3, diploma = 4, undergraduate = 5, postgraduate = 6. ^cNeed help = 1, barely enough = 2, enough for living expenses = 3, enough to save = 4. ^dSingle parent = 1, Married = 2

This outcome is contrary to Sreelakshmi and colleagues' investigation, which found no significant differences between maternal and paternal stress (Sreelakshmi et al., 2021). Moreover, Taubman-Ben-Ari et al. (2021) found that fathers experienced more parenting stress than mothers during the pandemic. Our result may be attributed to greater mental work taken by mothers during the pandemic than before the pandemic. A previous study showed that mothers who lacked support and had difficulty managing homeschool were generally more stressed than fathers (O'Sullivan et al., 2022). Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir (2021) reported that mothers experienced intense emotional labor on the one hand while trying to keep everyone in their home calm and safe on the other hand. This phenomenon is strongly evident in Eastern cultures, such as Indonesia, where the division of tasks at home lies on mothers' shoulders. The cultural and religious perspectives place Indonesian mothers as a person responsible for child rearing, domestic responsibility, and taking care of all family members (Priyatna, 2013; Rakhmawati, 2022; Syakriah, 2020). An unprecedented situation like the Covid-19 pandemic exaggerates strong gender norms and expectations toward mothers.

Our study revealed that financial conditions predicted the parenting stress experienced by both fathers and mothers. The more stable the financial condition is, the lower the stress. This result reflects those of Miller et al. (2020), who found that during the Covid-19 pandemic, unemployed fathers and mothers are more prone to experience parenting stress than those with part-time and full-time jobs. In line with our study, a study in the US also found that Covid-related job/financial security stress predicted psychological distress in parenting (Frankel et al., 2021).

Surprisingly, the higher their education, the more stressed the mother is. This result has not previously been described. A study reported that education did not significantly affect the parenting stress experienced by mothers (Rajgariah et al., 2021). However, our study partly supports the previous investigation by Parkes et al. (2015), in which high or low-educated mothers experienced more parenting stress than those with intermediate education. A possible explanation for our finding might be that higher-educated mothers perceive higher self-demand than those with lower academic backgrounds.

Another factor associated with maternal parenting stress is marital status. Single parents

experienced less parenting stress compared to married women. This finding contradicts a previous study on foster parents, which suggested that married parents experienced less parental stress compared to unmarried (Miller et al., 2020). The inconsistency may be due to different perceptions of marital roles. Those who are married have additional demands as a wife besides as a mother, which potentially leads to more stress experienced.

The present findings revealed that financial condition was the only predictor of the parenting stress experienced by fathers. This result is understandable because, in Indonesia, even though women also work and have financial income, the role of breadwinner is still laid on the father's shoulder. Therefore, for fathers, the financial issue plays a pivotal role in perceiving fulfilling obligations as parents. On the contrary, the Covid-19 pandemic forced mothers to spend more time in childrearing and home-schooling than working fathers (Ferguson, 2020). Working mothers are expected to increase their familial responsibilities when working at home (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). Demographic factors, such as gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, social class, and education, influence parenting stress (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2017)

Several limitations need to be considered. First, the generalizability of these findings is limited to the involved participants due to the applied sampling technique. Second, the proportion of fathers and mothers in this study is imbalanced.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study aimed to assess the demographic factor associated with parenting stress during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study has identified that mothers experience parenting stress more than fathers and reveal that financial condition is the only predictor of the parenting stress experienced by fathers. Besides financial condition, other variables, including working status, educational background, and marital status predicted mothers' parenting stress levels. On the contrary, having a spouse and higher education predicted higher mothers' stress.

Several sociodemographic variables associated with maternal parenting stress imply the urgency of interventions to promote maternal mental health, who are more prone to parenting stress than fathers. The intervention from mental health professionals and the government would be strategic since the mother plays a vital role in the family, especially in Indonesian culture. Thus, further research could be directed to explore

more variables for intervention, such as coping mechanisms and social support among mothers with unstable financial conditions, high education, and married mothers.

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