



## Together We Can Face On: Co-parenting and Parental Stress on Mothers During the Covid 19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

A mother becomes a figure who has a central role in the family, one of which is in terms of parenting. However, when carrying out the role of parenting, it is not always easy. Difficult conditions and situations will be encountered and allow stress to arise. The situation difficulty coupled with the occurrence of the covid-19 pandemic causes all activities to be carried out at home and adds to the work to become children's learning companions and to take care of family needs. The condition can make the mother feel pressure for the demands faced, causing stress. Looking at this, the researchers assessed a thing that can affect the stress of mothers when raising children (parental stress) is the involvement of partners in parenting (co-parenting). This study aims to prove, namely how the effect of co-parenting on parental stress in mothers, especially during the covid-19 pandemic. In the process, this study involved 62 mothers as research respondents by providing research questionnaires. The research questionnaire consisted of a co-parenting scale and a parental stress scale. The results of data analysis obtained by simple regression analysis showed that there was an effect of co-parenting on parental stress in mothers during the covid-19 pandemic ( $p < 0.05$ ). The output are that the role of partners in working together to care for and care for children can reduce the stress felt by mothers.

*Keywords:* Parenting, parental, covid-19.

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### 1. Introduction

Being a parent is not an easy role, moreover there is no formal school for it. Married couples who become parents need to learn to raise children. Parents have an important role for their children as educators, protectors, motivators, facilitators and mentors (Winarto, 2020). Parents are also considered to be important roles related to child development. This development is related to physical, cognitive and emotional skills that can be stimulated from infancy. Between the two parents, the mother becomes a fairly important role in the development of the child because it is a figure who can be said to often interact with children.

Suresh (2010) explain that the role of mothers in a family is quite high and complex. The mother must be able to manage all activities in her family, from managing finances, the needs of her husband and children, and children's education to the health of family members. In addition, many mothers have other roles, namely being working mothers. Munandar (Patil, 2016) explains that working mothers can be interpreted as mothers who in addition to their duties in taking care of the house also have other duties such as in the office or other workplaces and become entrepreneurs. Both career and non-career mothers have quite a lot of demands to be able to carry out family functions as well as possible, especially in the process of nurturing and educating children.

Guy & Arthur (2020) explained the Covid-19 pandemic that occurred throughout the world including Indonesia, made limited activity. These restricted community activities consist of the implementation of Large-Scale Social Restrictions (LSSR), Work from Home (WFH) for workers to Learning from Home (LFH) in educational settings. Regulations issued to implement LFH require that various activities of children carried out at school move to the home, causing the mother's task increases, namely assisting children in learning and becoming a teacher when learning online (Fauzi, 2022). Susilowati (2020) explained that many mothers in Indonesia experience various obstacles in assisting children studying from homes like impatience, lack of understanding of the material, signal and operating devices difficulties, and limited time to accompany children because they have to work. Conditions demand that the mother has to run several jobs at once. According to Ruppanner et al. (2019) in terms of work, mothers are people who have more tasks to do (multitasking) than fathers. When fathers spend time on one job, mothers can be able to spend more time doing several jobs at once (Offer & Schneider, 2019).

The demands experienced by mothers cause a large opportunity to have fatigue both physically and emotionally which can trigger stress (Kakhki, 2022). Parental stress is a series of psychological processes that would arise when parental role adaptation is carried out (Deater-Deckard in Lestari, 2013). Johansson, Benderix & Svensson (2020) also define parental stress as psychological pressure that arises due to demands in child care. The latest study shows that stress levels for mothers in Indonesia after the COVID-19 pandemic increased by 95% from previous years because the mother's duties increased as working, studying and various activities at home (Hadi, 2020). In line with this, (Ruppanner et al., 2019) also mentions that in a family, mothers are more depressed in the transitioning process to becoming parents when compared to fathers.

Berry & Jones (1995) described the cause of parental stress as when parents who care for their children find it difficult to meet the demands. This disability can affect the behaviour, well-being, and adjustment of children. Louie, Cromer & Berry (2017) explained that the parents as mothers felt parental stress, which can be related to the child's developmental conditions including child behaviour, incompatibility with development and also the many problems. When viewed in terms of children's emotional development, mothers who experience stress will cause children to feel helpless, resulting in low self-esteem and high anxiety (Fiese et al., 2017). The mother will face many burdens and demands and certainly, be greatly helped if the father assisted a partner in child care. Talking about parenting cannot only be the responsibility of the mother. Fathers also have an important role in the process of child-rearing. Cooperation between father and mother in the parenting process is often called co-parenting.

Co-parenting is described as a condition where husband and wife share roles and cooperate in their role in the process of parenting (Feinberg, 2002). Gable (Christopher et al., 2015) explained that co-parenting can be seen from the extent to which partners function as partners in the parenting process. The parenting process is ideally carried out together for husband and wife. The previous researchers say the same opinion that the involvement of fathers and mothers in raising children together will affect children's behaviour when they get older and mature (Feinberg et al., 2012). Cooperation in parenting also has a significant influence on the family, where co-parenting has been considered to affect well-being and the quality of relationships between family members (Nunes et al., 2020). Well-being and the quality of relationships between families will increase if the father and mother partner collaborate well in parenting.

The explanation above shows that co-parenting is needed in carrying out the role of parents. Co-parenting that is running well is considered to be able to lighten the burden of parenting one party because the couple shares the duties of carrying out parenting. The opinion of researchers about co-parenting that goes well in the family can help ease the tasks, work and pressure that mothers feel when carrying out their roles, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic where all family member activities are mostly done at home and are prone to stress. So the researchers suspect that there is a role for co-parenting in reducing maternal stress when carrying out parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Parental Stress**

Parental stress is a condition that arises because of demands during the parenting process and results in psychological pressure (Johansson et al., 2020). Deater & Deckard (Lestari, 2013) also explained that parental stress is the emergence of negative feelings due to the demands of the role of being a parent for the presence of children in the family. Parental stress is said to arise due to the demands felt by parents in the process of caring for children and parents also experience difficulties in the process (Berry & Jones, 1995). Parental stress can also be a form of negative experience in the form of loss of resources such as energy, self-esteem, happiness or affection in the parenting process (Zelman & Fero, 2018). Berry & Jones (1995) explained that parental stress consists of 4 aspects, namely parental rewards, parental stressors, lack of control and parental satisfaction.

Parental stress turns out the psychological state of parents in the parenting process will have an impact on several things in the care given to children as well as other things related to child care. Those affected by parental stress include a lack of acceptance of children, lack of attention to children and also the lack of affection given to children (Anthony et al., 2005; Putnick, 2008). will result in a child's lack of understanding of the structure or explanation when they receive punishment from their parents (Mak et al., 2020). The stress on parents is a combination of internal (personal) and external (environmental) factors. These factors include self-confidence, motivation, personality type, individual beliefs and the capacity for individuals to control. Family, experience and also work can be factors affecting stress in parenting (Herlanti et al., 2020).

### **2.2 Coparenting**

The term co-parenting was first recognized by Feinberg (2002), which is a term used for husband and wife sharing and working together in carrying out their parenting roles. Co-parenting is used to describe how people who are married and have children carry out joint activities in parenting and raising children (Feinberg, 2002; Feinberg et al., 2012; Asia & Setiawan, 2020). Parenting patterns carried out by parents to children will greatly shape the character of children, besides that parenting is also considered one of the influential factors in determining children's behavior

when they grow up (Feinberg et al., 2012). This shows the cooperative relationship in line with the formation of children's character when they get older and teenagers. In addition, co-parenting is also closely related to how parents mutually support each other in raising children, not dropping each other and competing in carrying out their parental roles (Qian et al., 2020). In the process, parents interact and communicate with each other to carry out the parenting role together (Lamela & Figueiredo, 2016).

Co-parenting has six aspects that are used as references in this research instrument, namely co-parenting agreement, co-parenting closeness, co-parenting support, co-parenting undermining, exposure of child to conflict, endorsement of partners parenting, and division of labor. (Feinberg et al., 2012). Furthermore, Feinberg, Brown, and Kan (2012) provide an explanation for each aspect. Where the co-parenting agreement relates to the compromise that the couple has in parenting. The compromise in this case is that each partner provides mutual support and is able to negotiate in determining parenting patterns for children. Differences in parenting patterns that occur between couples can cause conflict. The aspect of co-parenting closeness relates to a person's feeling of being a team with a partner in parenting. This aspect is also related to the presence of partners together in celebrating important moments in child development. Next is the aspect of co-parenting support, namely the perception that a person feels that a partner always supports the process of nurturing and acting as a parent. The opposite is the aspect of co-parenting undermining which refers to the feeling that the partner ignores and does not appreciate the parenting role performed. This aspect also includes the feeling that the partner is underestimating him or her in parenting. The next aspect is related to conflict, namely Exposure of child to conflict. This aspect relates to the child's exposure to conflict, which means that whether the conflict that occurs in the couple is carried out in front of the child so that the child knows the fight (difference of understanding) made by the parents or hides the conflict in front of the child. Next is the endorsement of partner's parenting, which is the giving of a positive attitude towards partners when they are raising children. Finally, there is the division of labor aspect, in which the spouses share tasks with each other in housework and child care. The division of tasks in this case is related to financial, medical and legal which is carried out fairly.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

#### **3.1. Materials**

Collecting data in this study used a questionnaire containing co-parenting and a parental stress scale. The two scales are compiled in a google form and distributed online to research respondents. The co-parenting scale used in this study is the co-parenting relationship scale from Feinberg, Brown and Kan (2012) which consists of 35 items (8 unfavorable items) and comes from seven aspects (co-parenting agreement, co-parenting closeness, co-parenting support, co-parenting undermining, endorse partner parenting, division of labor, and exposure to conflict). Then for parental stress, this study used a scale developed by Barry and Jones (1995) which consists of 18 items (8 unfavorable items). Before being used, this scaling instrument has been translated from English to Indonesian with the translation-back translation method.

In addition, this research questionnaire also contains a respondent's consent sheet to be involved in the research and also the respondent's data (age, number of children, length of the marriage, etc.). The sampling technique used in this research is the purposive sampling technique, where the criteria for the research respondents are a mother aged 20-50 years and who has children.

#### **3.2. Methods**

This research is non-experimental quantitative research with a regression approach, which aims to determine the effect of the co-parenting variable on the parental stress variable. Analysis of research data using regression analysis with the help of SPSS version 25. The research implementation process identifies problems about how the COVID-19 pandemic conditions affect human life, including mothers in carrying out their roles. In the next step, the researcher conducts a literature review and prepares to measure instruments sourced from previous research, which is then continued to prepare research measuring instruments. Both co-parenting and parental stress scales are still in English then the researchers translated the measuring instruments into Indonesian. The result of translation of the scaling tool used for the research data collection. The process of research data retrieval is done online, namely by distributing questionnaire links to respondents who meet the research criteria. The results of the research data retrieval obtained as many as 62 respondents who match the research criteria then the data is processed.

Research data processing begins with tabulating the data. The process of tabulating research data is carried out by taking into account the criteria for the answer scores of each research variable. The co-parenting variable has seven response scores for each item. The seven scores ranged from "never" (0) to "very often" (6) for the favorite item, while the unfavorable items moved from "never" (6) to "very often" (0). Furthermore, for the parental stress variable, each item has five answer choices that move from 1 meaning "strongly disagree" to 5 which means "strongly agree" for the favorite item. Meanwhile, for the unfavorable, the response moves from "strongly disagree" (5) to "strongly agree" (1). The next step after tabulating the data is that the researcher tests the research hypothesis using simple linear regression analysis with the help of SPSS version 25.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Result

This research was conducted on women who play the role of mothers and have children from various backgrounds (such as age, occupation, number and age of different children). Co-parenting in this study refers to the extent to which mothers who are respondents in this study perceive that their spouse (husband) plays a role in household chores and parenting. The higher the score obtained by the respondent, it means that the respondent feels that the husband makes a high contribution to the parenting process. Otherwise, if the score obtained is low, the respondent feels that the husband's role in parenting is lacking or it can be said that the husband lacks understanding in doing housework and caring for children. On the other hand, parental stress is related to the extent to which a person feels pressure when carrying out parental roles. The high parental stress score obtained by the respondents in this study showed that the respondents felt pressure and negative feelings when they were as a parent in raising children. Meanwhile, if the score obtained is low, it can be said that the respondent does not feel negative feelings or is not depressed by being a parent.

In this study, the research hypothesis was tested using simple linear regression analysis with the help of SPSS version 25. The results showed that there was a significant effect of co-parenting on parental stress with a significance value of 0.010 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the value of the regression coefficient in this study was obtained at -0.325, which means that the effect of co-parenting on parental stress is 32.5%. The negative value (-) refers to the pattern or direction of the two variables, where when co-parenting is high, parental stress will be low. On the other hand, when co-parenting is low, parental stress is high.

In addition to testing the hypothesis using simple regression analysis, the researcher also conducted a descriptive analysis. This aims to determine the general description of research data and is also used for categorizing research samples. Table 1 below is the result of descriptive analysis.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Analysis Results

	Co-Parenting	Parental Stress
Mean	254.35	35.27
Median	263.00	35.50
Std. Deviation	45.848	6.519
Minimum	130	25
Maximum	320	55

Based on the results of the descriptive analysis obtained, as shown in Table 1. The researcher then categorizes the research sample for each variable

**Table 2:** Categorization of Research Variables

	Co-Parenting	Presentase	Parental Stress	Presentase
High	34	55%	31	50%
Low	28	45%	31	50%

The results of the analysis are based on two categories: high and low. There are interesting findings in this analysis, where parental stress overall respondents are divided into two categories. As for co-parenting, most of the respondents are in the high category. The results show that most of the respondents feel that their partners are very involved and cooperate in caring for them.

### 4.2 Discussion

As described in the results section, the data processing of this study resulted in a significance value of 0.010 ( $p < 0.05$ ). It could be interpreted that the hypothesis in this study was accepted. So there was a co-parenting effect on parental stress in mothers during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, a regression coefficient value of -0.325 is obtained, which means 32.5% of the co-parenting effect on parental stress in mothers during the covid-19 pandemic. The results of this study are also in line with research conducted by Lau & Power (2019) that there is an influence between co-parenting and parental stress in parents. In addition, Han & Lee (2020) also explained that parental stress, both experienced by fathers and mothers, is related to co-parenting. High parenting stress is related to a lack of agreement and support in parenting. Furthermore, high parenting stress occurs when the conflict that arises when co-parenting is high (Thullen & Bonsall, 2017).

The role of co-parenting is considered to reduce parental stress. This finding is in line with that conveyed by Feinberg (2002) that co-parenting can reduce the stress that occurs due to parenting. Co-parenting is not only about parents sharing the responsibilities of nurturing and raising children but is also related to providing mutual support, sharing hope, and values and building a parenting culture within the family (Lamela & Figueiredo, 2016). Support

from partners represents a role in reducing stress due to parenting (Jam et al., 2021). This opinion is in line with Belsky's (Kang et al., 2020) that explains the support and cooperation provided by the father will be very helpful in reducing parental stress on the mother.

The sharing role and an agreement to carry out parenting between pairs of parents have resulted in the responsibility of nurturing not only being borne by one party which will result in feelings of lack of support and cooperation. It still happens that the mother is usually the most responsible figure in domestic affairs, in which there is child care and household chores (Brannon, 2016). So this finding can illustrate when the burden of care is not only the responsibility of one party. Shared responsibility can reduce parental stress on one of the parties who are considered responsible because co-parenting shows that parenting is not only the responsibility of one party.

Table 2 shows that as many as 34 respondents have high co-parenting scores. Arnold (Trisnadi & Andayani, 2021) explains that when parents in the childcare process have an understanding of parenting patterns and do it consistently, positive co-parenting will be created. Positive co-parenting can also occur when a person feels that partners share a role in parenting and jointly determine the parenting culture that is carried out (Nunes et al., 2020). The existence of co-parenting carried out by parents certainly has a positive impact on children. Palkovitz (2013) explain that co-parenting carried out by parents can be a model for their children in living life, so co-parenting or cooperation in parenting is very important.

Viewing table 2, as many as 28 respondents in this study had a low level of co-parenting. This low co-parenting can be said to be negative co-parenting because there is no cooperation between father and mother. Solmeyer and Feinberg (2011) explain that when parents do not have an agreement for child care, it will develop conflicts between fathers and mothers and uncoordinate all forms of parenting. In addition to having an impact on the relationship between parents and the parenting process, negative co-parenting also has a negative impact on child development. Poor coordination, parents underestimating their role, and lack of warmth and cooperation carried out by parents are the causes of children at risk in their development. One example is a family that has a low level of support and cooperation in co-parenting will tend to make it difficult to adjust (Mc. Hale, Johnson & Sinclair in Santrock, 2007).

Table 2 in the results section shows that 31 respondents in this study have a high level of parental stress. One factor that makes it a high level is the age of children at an early age. Typically, a high level of parental stress takes in the early years of child development (Crnic & Low, 2002). High levels of stress will have an impact on one's life, especially on a mother who has a caring responsibility. Crnic & Low (2002) explained that parental stress experienced by the mother has a broad impact on several things in the family. The impact does not have on the pattern of parenting given to children but also on interaction with children. Lee (Kang et al., 2020) explained the parental stress experienced by the mother occurs almost every day from the results of fatigue, frustration, and difficulty communicating with her partner. Lack of communication with a partner will cause mothers to feel a lack of emotional support and trust from their partner. The same opinion of Benazon and Coyne (2000) explains that mothers who experience depression due to parenting will display difficulties in communication, negative feelings, and often criticizing and defensive attitudes.

## 5. Conclusion

Co-parenting and parental stress are two things that can be considered in the family. Based on the research findings, it shows that co-parenting has a significant effect on parental stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that the stress that occurs in a mother when carrying out the parenting role can be reduced when she feels that her partner is involved and cooperates in parenting. Positive co-parenting will make the cooperation between father and mother in parenting better and will also support various aspects of development in children. In addition, not only the relationship between parents and children is good, but the relationship or communication between father and mother will also be good. The support and cooperation of partners when caring for children will greatly help reduce the mother's parental stress, which may feel heavier during the COVID-19 pandemic in carrying out activities.

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