



Parental Burnout and Self-Compassion of Mothers with Elementary-Aged Children During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. The Covid-19 pandemic situation has changed many aspects of people's daily lives. Conditions that are not ideal make the practice of parenting more challenging, especially for parents with elementary-aged children. Hence, parents have a greater risk of experiencing parental burnout. One of the inhibiting factors for parental burnout is self-compassion. This study was conducted to determine the relationship between self-compassion and parental burnout. Correlational quantitative research was conducted by involving 108 respondents of mothers with elementary school-aged children in Yogyakarta. The data were analyzed using the Spearman Rho analysis technique. It shows a negative relationship between self-compassion and parental burnout ($p = 0.000$). In addition, through additional testing, it was found that parental burnout was also related to the number of children ($p = 0.040$). Unlike previous studies, it doesn't show any correlation between parental burnout and the mother's employment status or family income.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic · Mother with elementary school-aged children · Parental burnout · Self-Compassion

1 Introduction

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has caused major changes in various aspects of people's lives worldwide. In a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, the majority of adults reported that their lives had changed since the beginning of the pandemic, and half of them said that they undergo significant changes. A quarter of adult respondents said that at least one family member had lost their job, and one-third of them said that their income had decreased [1].

The work pattern has changed. People started working from home. Children started to learn from home. Regarding this condition, the research conducted by Ongoren [2] found that the pandemic brought positive changes in mother-child relationships. Parents and children spend more time together by doing various activities and communicating more intensely. Such activities improve the closeness between mother and child and as a consequence, they get to know each other better.

However, some people find it difficult to spend time together at home. Another research by Griffith [1] indicates that many parents who still have a job during the Covid-19 pandemic report difficulties in carrying out parenting. It is because of the burdensome workload for parents to balance between their duties as full-time workers and children's duties at school as well as household chores.

The impact of the pandemic on mental health is concerning. Previous research has been conducted to determine how the Covid-19 pandemic affects people's mental health in general. Some studies have shown that stressors relevant to this pandemic, associated with stress levels as well as symptoms of anxiety and depression suffered by parents in the United States [3], increase negative emotions in Australian adults [4], increase the stress of college students in China [5], increase parenting stress [6], and increase peritraumatic stress felt by parents and children [7].

According to research conducted by Susilowati [6], many mothers experienced parenting stress during the Covid-19 pandemic. The highest level of parenting stress is suffered by mothers with elementary-aged children. Parenting stress suffered for a long time can lead to parental burnout. Parental burnout refers to a condition of severe exhaustion due to prolonged stress suffered by parents with three main characteristics; emotional exhaustion, emotional distancing from children, and low feelings of personal achievement as a parent [8].

Parental burnout is known to be related to violence potential and children's neglect [9]. Thus, children are likely to experience long-term impacts on their parent's mental health conditions [1]. The report on cases of violence to children in the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta province in 2021, which has significantly increased from previous years, encourages researchers to conduct this research. The data collection will specifically be held in Yogyakarta because the most notable increase occurred in Yogyakarta city [10].

There were 104 reports on cases of violence against children from early January to July, when this research was written, which number is much higher than the total reports for one year in 2018, 2019, and 2020, which were only 70, 65, and 83 reports respectively. Although not all of the violence occurred in the family, however, 82% occurred in the families [10].

To unravel this problem, the researcher tried to look at the driving factors and inhibiting factors for parental burnout. Mikolajczak dan Roskam [11] explained the existence of two types of factors in the theory of parental burnout; driving factors and inhibiting factors. Some of the factors driving the parental burnout onset are parental perfectionism, low emotional intelligence, poor parenting practice, burdensome housework, lack of support from partners, and lack of external support from family and friends. On the contrary, factors inhibiting parental burnout include high emotional intelligence, good parenting practice, leisure time, supportive partners and family, and self-compassion.

Self-compassion is an attitude of openness and understanding of oneself by not judging any mistakes or failures one experiences. Self-compassion means full awareness within one's self that every suffering or pain, failure, and error is part of human nature; that everyone including him/herself has the right to receive love or compassion [12].

The occurrence of this Covid-19 pandemic is beyond anyone's control. Many things cannot run normally because of this situation. The children's first year of school has to be undergone differently. It could be disappointing. Parents who already have a lot of good

parenting plans and practices, due to major changes, are no longer able to implement them. Parents may fail to meet their expectations of their children due to changing situations that are too contrasting. This situation makes parents vulnerable to parental burnout, one of which is manifested in feeling different from their previous selves and being ashamed of themselves as parents.

But people with self-compassion will try to see that they did their best and that what is now happening is completely out of their control. Parents with good self-compassion will realize fast that other parents in almost all parts of the world are experiencing the same thing (common humanity). They will dive into themselves to accept that their disappointment or failure is natural (self-kindness) and focus on what they can do concretely. Behavioral manifestations appearing from parents with good self-compassion are subsequently assumed to reduce the risk of suffering parental burnout.

The potential for developing self-compassion to reduce the risk of parental burnout makes the researcher interested in carrying out research into the correlation between self-compassion and parental burnout during this pandemic era.

2 Method

2.1 Participant

A total of 130 mothers participated in this research, but only 108 respondents met the criteria and filled out the questionnaire completely. The age of the respondents ranged from 25–53 years with an average age of 38.88 years old. The 108 respondents consists of 99 married respondents (91.67%), 4 divorcees (3.7%), 4 widows (3.7%), and 1 unmarried respondent (0.93%). The latest education of all respondents also varied from junior high school to undergraduate level. The number of children and the mother's employment status also vary. Detailed information regarding the demographic conditions of the respondents can be seen in Table 1.

2.2 Procedure

The research procedure was carried out by adapting the measuring instrument used, namely the Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA) from English to Indonesian. The adaptation process was carried out through five stages-transliteration, synthesis, back-translation, review by experts, and tryout [13]. The translation process was carried out by two sworn translators, one that was familiar with the topic and the other that was not. The results of both translations were subsequently synthesized by the researcher.

The synthesis results were sent to different sworn translators for back-translation. The back-translated versions of the measuring instrument were corrected by the measuring instrument owner to ensure that the Indonesian translations used did not deviate from the meaning of the original items. The researcher then corrected the measuring instrument following advice from the owner of the measuring instrument. The next processes were expert review and tryout. The tryout was carried out together with another instrument.

The questionnaire link was then distributed through social media such as Whatsapp, Twitter, and Instagram. Potential respondents who qualified for the study filled out the questionnaire.

2.3 Measures

The Self-Compassion Scale developed by Neff [12] and translated by Sugianto, Suwartono, dan Sutanto [14] consists of 26 items that measure self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness as the aspects of self-compassion, as well as self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification as opposite components of self-compassion. Item selection after the tryout resulted in a final measuring instrument with 23 items. These twenty-three items then produced the final SWD reliability coefficient used for data collection of 0.883.

The Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA) developed by Roskam, Brianda, and Mikołajczak [15] consists of 23 items that measure the aspects of exhaustion, a contrast to previous self-feelings of being fed up, and emotional distancing. The item selection process carried out after the tryout resulted in a final measuring instrument with 18 items. These eighteen items were then tested for reliability and the result was the final PBA reliability coefficient used for data collection of 0.802.

2.4 Statistical Analysis

The data analysis process was carried out using SPSS version 16. Before being analyzed, the data went through a process of testing assumptions first. The data obtained were known to be not normally distributed, so the analysis technique used was non-parametric. Some of the analytical techniques used were the Spearman Rho analysis technique to examine the correlation between self-compassion and parental burnout and the Kruskal Wallis analysis technique to examine the correlation between some demographic conditions such as mother's employment status, the number of children, and mother's latest education with parental burnout.

3 Results

74 people (68.5%) showed moderate self-compassion scores while 34 others (31.5%) showed high self-compassion scores. There were no respondents showing compassion in the low category. At the same time, for parental burnout scores, as many as 100 respondents (92.6%) showed low parental burnout scores, and 8 others (7.4%) were in the moderate category. No respondents were showing parental burnout in the high category. The results of the respondents' scores can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3.

As the data showed was not normally distributed, the analysis was carried out using non-parametric analysis techniques. Concerning why the research was continued without additional respondents, will be explained in the discussion. After carrying out the analysis test using the Spearman Rho technique, the result was a significance p of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), meaning that the proposed hypothesis, namely that there is a correlation between self-compassion and parental burnout, was accepted.

The correlation coefficient found was -0.388 . It foreshadows the correlation between the variables of self-compassion and parental burnout was negative. The higher a person's self-compassion, the lower the parental burnout score. To determine the effective contribution, the correlation coefficient was squared, and the resulting number was 0.15,

so it can be said that the effective contribution of self-compassion to parental burnout was 15%. The remaining 85% was influenced by other factors not examined in this research.

After finding a significant negative relationship between self-compassion and parental burnout, the researcher conducted additional tests to examine the correlation between some demographic variables, viz. Employment status and the number of children, and parental burnout. The correlation between demographic conditions has previously been studied by Vigouroux dan Scola [16] and indicated that the higher the number of children, the higher the risk of suffering parental burnout. Another study conducted by Lebert-Charron and colleagues [17] also shows that there is a correlation between demographic factors in the form of maternal employment status and parental burnout and housewives showing higher parental burnout compared to full-time and part-time working mothers.

Additional analysis to examine the correlation between the number of children and parental burnout was performed using Spearman Rho's non-parametric analysis technique. The result was that there was a significant positive correlation between the number of children and parental burnout suffered by mothers with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) and a correlation coefficient of 0.318. A positive correlation shows that the more children they have, the higher the risk of parental burnout suffered. In contrast, fewer children were associated with a lower risk of parental burnout.

However, the test on the correlation between maternal employment status and parental burnout using Kruskal Wallis' non-parametric analysis technique did not show any significant results between the two variables. Therefore, it can be said that there is no correlation between maternal employment status and parental burnout suffered.

4 Discussion

This study has found that the self-compassion of mothers with elementary school-aged children had a negative correlation with parental burnout. These results were in line with previous research conducted by Gerber, Davidovics, dan Anaki [18]. The research also found that self-compassion and concern for others were factors inhibiting burnout experienced by parents. This research aligns with other research conducted by Bohadana, Morissey, and Paynter [19] which showed that negative aspects of self-compassion were the predictors of stress in parents and positive aspects of self-compassion were the predictors of parents' quality of life.

The positive aspects of self-compassion include self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Mindfulness itself as an important component of self-compassion has been widely studied in various studies. One of them was the research conducted by Chaplin and colleagues [20] indicating that mindfulness helps parents to remain calm and not over-reactive to whatever their children do. It allows parents to have a more positive view of their children and parenting in general. This finding was later corroborated by the findings in the research of Han [21] showing that positive parenting practices reflect a negative relationship with behavioral problems in children. It implies that mindfulness encourages parents to adopt more positive parenting and indirectly reduces the likelihood of children showing behavioral problems, that consequently, the parent-children relationship is not difficult for both of them to establish.

However, the findings in this research are unique because they were carried out on respondents without extreme conditions as in previous research. Accompanying children to study at home for more than a year is a new and difficult condition, although it has a different context from parents with children with special physical conditions. As a result, only 7.4% of the total respondents showed a moderate level of parental burnout and none of the respondents were at a high level. Another unique thing is that this number is in contrast to the self-compassion variable measured by the researcher, where none of the respondents showed a low level of self-compassion. Most of the respondents were at the medium level (68.5%) and the rest were at the high level (31.5%).

In addition, the absence of respondents at the high level of parental burnout variable and the absence of respondents at low levels for the self-compassion variable was arguably related to socio-cultural conditions in Indonesia and more specifically, in Yogyakarta. In a country with a strong collectivist culture like Indonesia, community members tend to see common goals as more important than personal goals, so the connection between community members is getting stronger [22].

One of the self-compassion components, for example, is common humanity, which is realizing that all the difficulties faced by respondents are part of every human journey [12]. This is easily understood by people who are in a collective environment because traditional values like this are considered important for members of a collective society, in contrast to more individualist countries like Australia. This believed traditional value then affects parenting practices by parents in both countries [23].

Parents in collective society hold tightly to the tradition, especially to follow the expectations or desires of others [24]. Because other people's views are so important to society in a collective environment, some questions on the parental burnout assessment that were dropped due to low variability could be caused by social desirability bias that appears specifically in Indonesia, not in other countries.

Most of the people in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, are Muslims (92.87%) [25]. Research conducted by Fahmi and Pinem [26] shows that in Muslim families in Indonesia, children are seen as gifts from God who have noble life values. However, in the same research, children also have social values as something very important in life.

The way Indonesian parents see their children is reinforced by the religious values and traditions of the collectivity that they believe in are very likely to make respondents in this research feel taboo about admitting fatigue as a parent. Especially in several items that mention the feeling of no longer being able to be a parent.

5 Conclusion and Suggestion

5.1 Conclusion

This research was conducted to determine the correlation between self-compassion and parental burnout in mothers with elementary-aged children during the COVID-19 pandemic era in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The results are under the hypothesis that has been predicted by the researcher, namely that there is a negative correlation between the two variables. The higher the mother's self-compassion, the lower the risk of suffering from parental burnout. On the other hand, the lower the mother's self-compassion, the higher the risk of suffering from parental burnout. This research provides a new contribution,

especially regarding the construct of parental burnout which is still not widely discussed in Indonesia. However, this research is not without limitations.

5.2 Suggestion

This research still has many shortcomings that need to be considered by other researchers in the future. First, the limited time that the researcher has made the number of participating respondents less representative with relatively limited coverage, only one city. This unrepresentative data of respondents subsequently causes an abnormal distribution. Further research is needed. Indonesia has a variety of ethnicities, cultures, and languages that each of them should be represented to deepen the understanding of this topic.

Second, the process of adapting measuring instruments is carried out literally, giving rise to a cultural bias disqualifying several items. The process of re-adaptation that pays more attention to these vulnerable items needs to be carried out by future researchers. Some items may need to be adapted to the existing culture in Indonesia.

Third, the researcher did not ask about of residence classification (rural/urban) and religion in the respondent's data of this research. Respondents' self-data in future research is expected to be more complete, thus revealing more demographic factors that might contribute to the correlation between variables.

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