OPEN ACCESS
Islamic Research, Pages 62 – 68, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2022
DOI: 10.47076/ir.v5i1.128
E-ISSN: 2654-3974
www.islamicresearch.id

ISLAMICRESEARCH
The International Journal of Islamic Civilization Studies

Research Article

Experience of Indonesian Working Mothers during Covid-19 Pandemic

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords
Motherhood, Working mothers, Covid-19

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Article History
Received 16 July 2021
Accepted 29 March 2022
Published online 1 April 2022

ABSTRACT

Indonesia is in a state of emergency related to the Covid-19 pandemic which has brought major disruptions to social and economic aspects, including in the family. When schools and daycare facilities are closed due to the Covid-19, working mothers faced professional problems in balancing work and family duties. This research aims to understand the motherhood experience of Indonesian working mothers in the Covid-19 pandemic. The study was conducted to collect in-depth interview data with a semi-structured scale on six working mothers in various fields. The results showed that the strain of Indonesian working mothers escalates during the Covid-19 pandemic. Working mothers are finding it challenging to divide their time and energy between employment and childcare. They felt guilty for their children because they prioritized working rather than parenting. They also experience burnout in the form of physical and emotional exhaustion with professional obligations and child caretaking. The mothers' emotional turbulence may lead to children maltreatment. However, some mothers reported their work and motherhood dynamic can be resolved with a good support system, particularly from husband.

1. INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, World Health Organization (WHO) was informed of a novel unknown infectious disease detected in the city of Wuhan, the capital of China's Hubei Province. It was identified as a pandemic and momentarily has had a worldwide impact on the economy, health, and lifestyle like no other in the last 100 years (Akula & McCubrey, 2020). Since then, the impact has spread rapidly across the globe, including Indonesia.

Indonesia is under pressure from the Covid-19. The number of positive cases of Covid-19 in Indonesia in 2021 hits 1 million per January (Satuan Tugas Penanganan COVID-19, 2021). Indonesia announced no infection at all when the Covid-19 struck China the most seriously between December 2019 and February 2020. Indonesian President Joko Widodo confirmed its first two cases of Covid-19 infection only on 2 March 2020. Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world, and this is predicted to suffer greatly and over a longer period, when compared to other less-populous countries (Olivia et al., 2020).

Joko Widodo encourages Indonesian people to work, study and worship at home so that the escalation of Covid-19 could be inhibited. Moreover, Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan decided to enforce full Large-Scale Social Restrictions (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar/ PSBB*) in April and September 2020 (Winda, 2020). Governors, regents, and mayors may propose PSBB on their respective regions to the Minister of Health. The PSBB was regulated in Regulation of Minister of Health Number 9 of 2020 on Guidelines to Large-scale Social Restrictions in Accelerating Covid-19 Mitigation (setkab.go.id). Working from home (WFH) is paid work done remotely, usually from home. This is a part of limiting activities outside the home to maintain distance from other people (Abidah et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Indonesian government also announce limited school closure to stop Covid-19 transmission. Several regions in Indonesia have had school closure decisions and traditional learning that emphasizes the interaction of teachers and students shifts to distance learning. Referring to the Circular Letter of Minister of Education and Culture

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No. 3 of 2020 on the prevention of Covid-19 in the Education Unit, students teaching and learning practices are undertaken by distance learning activities to avoid the transmission of Corona Virus Disease (Ifdil et al., 2020).

This was also followed by the heads of official public services in Indonesia have instructed people to learn, work, and pray from home. This is reciprocal with the prevention of the Covid-19 campaign to held social distancing, also called physical distancing, which means keeping a safe space between someone and other people who are not from his household. Keeping distance from other people at least six feet away (about 2 arms' length) in both indoor and outdoor spaces lessens the chances of catching Covid-19.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on the family system. When schools and daycare facilities are closed due to the Covid-19, working parents face professional problems in balancing work and family duties. Many parents are struggling with employment issues while also devoting more time to their children's caretaking. According to a recent Wall Street Journal article, more than 4 million US professionals who do not work from home may be forced to leave the workforce this autumn to help their children learn from a distance (Cerullo, 2020).

Parents in the Covid-19 pandemic are dealing with stresses, including elevated anxiety and depressive symptoms. The massive transmission of the virus has had a psychological effect on society, including elevated levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Many parents do not have enough time to devote to their children's schooling. This also adds to the worry of many families who aren't used to being so close for such a long time. According to the American Psychological Association, 74% of parents reported that disrupted routines and adjusting to new routines were a significant source of stress in their lives (Griffith, 2020; Ifdil et al., 2020). Increased parenting stress and, in turn, increased risk of harsh parenting. Parents with higher levels of cumulative tension exhibit more strict and coercive parenting practices (Chung et al., 2020).

Working mothers found balancing work, household duties, and childcare particularly difficult during Covid-19. Research from the U.S. Census Bureau and Federal Reserve shows that nearly one in five working-age adults aren't working because Covid-19 disrupted their childcare arrangements. Within this group, women ages 25-44 are almost three times as likely as men to not be working because of their parental responsibilities (Cerullo, 2020). Similarly, from Collins et al., (2020), data also says mothers with young children have reduced their work hours four to five times more than fathers. This is especially true for those with primary school-age or younger children in the home for whom caregiving and homeschooling demands are most intense. mothers with young children in the home (ages 1–5) report work-time reductions.

Since before the pandemic, working mothers in Indonesia have been juggling work-family balance. Previous research from (Handayani et.al, 2015) also (Wijayanto & Fauziah, 2018) result how Indonesian working mothers' experience in balancing work and family. Indonesians working mothers deal with conflict of caretaking children and ideal worker norm. When the mother can balance between the aspect of work and family, but feel too tired for her double role, then the child growth cannot be optimum, for there is no support or collaboration from the husband regarding the parenting. Research also shows how Indonesian working mothers struggle with work-family conflict during Covid-19 pandemic (Alifah, 2021; Jatmika & Suryadi, 2021; Sandini et al., 2021). During Covid-19, Indonesian working mothers suffer with stress as a result of the adjustment among employment and child rearing and it lead to work-family conflict. Work–family challenges were discussed in communication academic discussions about how working mothers deal with work and family responsibilities (Day, 2013; Gardner & Cutrona, 2004; Kirby et al., 2003). This research aims to analyze the motherhood experience of Indonesian working mothers in the Covid-19 pandemic. Some prior research examined into the factors that affect work-family conflict. There are still unanswered problems concerning how working mothers construct meaning of their experiences balancing work and family during Covid-19. Learn the challenges is crucial to properly address their needs to improve intervention programs.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

To understand the motherhood experience of Indonesian working mothers in the Covid-19 pandemic, this study was conducted as descriptive qualitative research within interpretive paradigm. This framework proposes that participants build various realities based on their experiences. These personal experiences are used as a resource in this qualitative study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This method revealed working mothers' experiences in the Covid-19 pandemic. A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was developed between May and December 2020. Six Indonesian full-time working women from a variety of vocations and cities of residence in Indonesia (Bali, East Java, Banten and DKI Jakarta Province), with children ranging in age from one year to 23 years were interviewed individually. The informants were chosen through a network of researchers using a purposive sampling technique, with the assumption that informants would be willing to provide information in in-depth interviews. Other

characteristics including socioeconomic situation and education levels were not taken into consideration. Face-to-face and voice-to-voice interviews with safety measures were conducted due to the spread of Covid-19. An audio recorder was used to record all the answers. Written informed consent was used to provide participants with ethical information such as the study's aims, the confidentiality of their participation in the study, and the participants' ability to withdraw at any time. The data was coded and thematically analyzed using Miles et al., (2014) data analysis techniques such as data condensation, data visualization, and drawing and validating findings. There were two main themes highlighted through qualitative data analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1.1. Results

Two themes of Indonesian working mothers' motherhood experience in the Covid-19 pandemic were identified through qualitative analysis: the meanings of mothering for working mothers and working mothers' adaptations during Covid-19.

The Meanings of Mothering for Working Mothers

The participants in this research saw mothers play critical roles in children's development. Mothers ensure certain that their children's demands are fulfilled, teach good life values so that their children grow up to be *shalih* and *shalihah*, also build resilience in their children. Mothers, as role models for their children, become caretakers and instructors, educating and teaching both academic concerns and moral norms to their children. Some participants expressed their opinions based on the Al-Qur'an, which states that mothers have the responsibility of giving guidance to Allah (God). According to participants, if the child has a deep relationship with The Creator, parenting becomes easier.

> *I always say that "I don't know what you are doing out there, but you have to remember that Allah is always watching and protect you". That's what I always emphasize. (Participant MD)*

Participants view working mothers as excellent figures because working mothers have the responsibility to meet the family's financial needs or even serving as the breadwinner. Working mothers have dreams that they want to achieve, for example, such as providing their children with higher education. Working mothers are also seen as extraordinary since they are willing to dedicate their time to work and home responsibilities simultaneously

> *(Mother) organizes who must pick up, who must shop, who must prepare school uniforms, who must make meals, and so on. (Participant L)*

On the other hand, participants saw the ideal mothers need to always be there when children need support, which is hard to gain by working mothers. Working mothers feel guilty when it comes to childcare. Mothers want to spend more time with each of their children, but many find it difficult to balance work and family life, especially with the Work From Home scheme implemented following Covid-19. Working women feel sorry for their children as a result of their lack of parenting time and become a victim of their stress. Because mothers are preoccupied with their jobs, children do not receive the attention they deserve, and their education suffers as a result. The mother considered quitting her job and focusing solely on being a housewife because her children were neglected, having academic problems, and frequently making an argument with her.

> *The child feels like I want to (be with mother) but (they) can't (due to the situations of working mother). (Participant F)*
>
> *For me, (resigning) is more about the children because I don't want them to be estranged from their parents and their religious education is insufficient. (Participant SD)*

Working Mothers' Adaptations During Covid-19

Finding revealed that there is a diversity of adjustments to the rhythm of the mother's work pattern during the pandemic. Some participants found the pattern of splitting time between work and childcare, as well as working from home, to be extremely challenging. This is a major shift in working mothers' professionalism. Previously, working mothers set clear boundaries between the responsibilities of workers and housewives. But it brings a dramatic change after the pandemic. Every day they work at home while caring for their children because the children receive an education at home during the pandemic. Working women are confused about how to help their children learn. Because the mother prioritizes work, many of the children's assignments are missed. The absence of discipline in the household of the children perpetuates the problem. They work in the same place as their children, spend more time with them, but they are unable to engage with their children because they must concentrate on their work. Working

from home practices, according to Participants SD, significantly reduced the amount of interaction between mother and children.

> *In fact, there's more (time with children). However, because work must be on standby, whether (I) like it or not, the focus is divided due to working from home. Participant (SD)*

Participants have difficulties dividing their time and energy with job deadlines, many unfinished home chores, and their children's demands to be understood. They felt much more exhausted than before as mothers become more tired because children spend a lot of time at home and work that is also done at home at the same moment. Mothers claim that there are situations when they must sacrifice things such as their own time (me time) and spouses who must understand the conditions more. Sometimes mothers finish work, particularly deadlines, at night when their children are sleeping. Mother is physically and psychologically exhausted due to a lack of sleep, unfinished works, and boredom due to the pandemic. Because of this issue, moms frequently grumble, become emotional, and scold their children. Participants believe they are terrible mothers since their children are often the victims of mother's work-related stress. Working women strike a balance between school and family by negotiating work assignments while doing necessary household chores. A mother, for example, may inform her supervisor that she has to cook for her children and therefore postpones work. Working mothers can do so because they believe they have worked for a long time and have developed good relations with their employers.

> *I often regret what I say (to my children) when I am tired (Participant F)*
> *So when it's time to look after them (my children), I'm not irritated because my work isn't finished yet. I made the decision that I would (better) work overtime to spend more time with my children. (Participant NM)*

However, other participants, who work as a doctor and head of the Public Health Center (*Puskesmas*) (participant L), and works in a private company (participant SA) reported they have fewer difficulties figuring work arrangements or managing domestic issues because their job schedule has been relatively unchanged. Participant L also has no issues working and caring for her children because their ages range from teens to adults (17, 21, and 22 years old), they considered being able to be independent. She believes that as a result of social distancing, more children are at home, having a positive effect on better communication. A similar condition also occurred in participant MD's family. Participant MD has no trouble adapting because she is self-employed and runs her business from home. She has been operating an online business using social media since before the pandemic. She schedules time at the beginning of each month to ensure that the responsibilities of work and caregiving are balanced. Furthermore, all of the interviewees agreed that their husband helps them deal with mothering and career issues.

> *With the outbreak, (children) schooling at home, and doing (other activities) at home as well, giving us more time to communicate and pay attention to each other (Participant L).*

3.1.2. Discussion

The results of the qualitative study revealed that Indonesian working mothers encounter the dynamics of childcare and employment. Working mothers have the difficulty balancing their job and childcare roles. The role is described sociologically as a set of behaviors that are demonstrated to fulfill one's own and others' expectations (Heiss, 1981 in Mikolajczak et al., (2020)). Working mothers are striving to grow professionally whilst also supporting their families. Working mothers consider their children to be the most important thing in their life. Working mothers recognize the significance of the mother's role in childcare, including fulfilling children's needs, embedding life and religious values, also educating in academic areas. This is in line with (Golden, 2001) research, which indicated that mothers attempt to reconstruct their roles to balance employment and child care. Individuals constantly assess their positions for comfort, and then make either major (parenthood) or little adjustments (eg reduce certain friendships).

The strain of working mothers escalates in the Covid-19 Pandemic. They are working from home while at the same time caring for their children, participating in children's school from home practices, and performing domestic chores. Working mothers are finding it challenging to divide their time and energy between employment and childcare. As children were at home 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, parental duties increased substantially (Griffith, 2020). As the availability of social assistance has diminished, mothers have come to expect a shortage of leisure time. Working mothers reported feeling guilty since they work in the same building as their children yet they are unable to engage with them due to job obligations. Mothers regard their children as the highest concern in their life, but in fact, work took priority over children. Mothers stated they do not have enough time for completing their work and take care of their children. Because they are currently on work deadlines and avoiding punishments from their employers, they are unable to accompany online learning activities for children who attend School from Home (SFH). After completing

professional employment, they assist children in SFH activities. Mothers in this situation want to quit their careers so that they can accommodate their children's rights. Mothers are anxious that their children would grow up without gaining support or being connected to their parents and family. Mothers also wish to focus on helping the development of their children. Poduval & Poduval (2009) stated lack of time and guilt over perceived neglect of the parenting responsibility are two of the most stressful aspects of being a working mother.

Working mothers try to reconcile the tension experienced between work and childcare. Johnston & Swanson (2007) quote it as 'cognitive acrobatic' to justify working mothers' effort in facing expectations of an intensive mothering ideology. This parenting ideology is defined with the statement 'the child needs consistent care by one primary caregiver and the mother is the best person for the job'. Mothers are the sole source that provides guidance, care, education as well as physical and social livelihoods for children. According to research by Johnston & Swanson (2007), most full-time working mothers are unable to reconcile the tension between their identity as mothers and employees. Working mothers' cognitive acrobatics have the potential for causing unhealthy stress in both them and their children.

The findings imply that some working mothers experienced burnout due to the dynamics of work and childcare during the Covid-19 pandemic. Burnout refers to the physical and emotional exhaustion that parents might encounter during the parenting process. Burnout is also marked by the emotional distance between parents and children and the parents' tasks cannot be completed properly (Hubert & Aujoulat, 2018). Working mothers who engage in a work-from-home arrangement experience higher job pressure than normal since they work overtime each day. Working mothers are vulnerable to mental stress due to high workload pressure, work deadlines, household chores, and balancing working hours with childcare. When working from home, mothers find that doing their work at night when their children are sleeping is the best solution. According to Davis and Green (2020) in (Griffith, 2020), workers in the Covid-19 Pandemic may work an extra 3 hours per day, with many of them working late at night. It makes them feel less rested throughout the day, both physically and mentally. This condition has an impact on the mother's relationship with her family, as well as her ability to care for her kid. When the child's behaviors do not meet the mother's expectations, working mothers feel annoyed. Working mothers have unstable emotional states while dealing with their children, using harsh tones, or scolding them as a result of workplace and parenting stress. The study by (Chung et al., 2020) indicated parental stress during Covid-19 increased the likelihood of harsh parenting, in line with the study by Mikolajczak et al., (2020) reported parental burnout had several specific consequences such as parental violence.

On the other hand, some participants who work in the health sector, private industry, or as an entrepreneur, are happy with their jobs and consider them meaningful. Work provides added value in the mothers' life. Mothers interpret themselves as outstanding since they can work, raise children, and manage the household all at the same time. This is explained by (Buzzanell et al., 2005) that working mothers feel superior and become better mothers because of their work. They also have relatively easy balance work and family because their children's ages range from teens to adults. According to the Hattery research in Mikolajczak et al., (2020), some mothers consider they are "better mothers" when they fulfill their goals and spend time away from their children. These mothers work outside the home, value their professional identity, believe their youngster is doing well in public child care, and do not feel guilty about their decisions.

The dynamic experience of working mothers juggling work and motherhood can be resolved with a good support system, particularly from their husbands. Working mothers make arrangements of child care and domestic duties within parents and support systems. Previous research by (Buzzanell et al., 2005) has shown that the image of a 'good mother' who takes care of children has shifted to a 'good working mother' with the role of designing quality child care such as daycare, husband, grandparents, family members, or nanny, allocating household tasks and feeling happiness in working and caring for children. It is also similar to the study of Christopher (2012), working mothers refuse intensive mothering then constructing care in terms of 'extensive' rather than 'intensive' in the sense that even if they are unable to be with their children during working hours, they remain responsible for childcare through delegation to the other party. Wilson (2006) found that the meaning of working mothers is not always available in the family, but who builds sovereignty in the family by not always being present to provide for family needs, which is consistent with the findings of this study. Working mothers said their husbands played an important role in balancing work and family life. It appears to correlate with the findings of Poduval & Poduval (2009) and (Mikolajczak et al., 2020) that when husbands and wives care for children in a balanced way, working mothers' feelings of guilt for the children are reduced and they are more satisfied as working mothers. Mutual understanding between spouses implies that both

parents continue to enjoy each other's company as partners while sharing the responsibilities of parenting and the tremendous pleasure that comes with it.

4. CONCLUSION

Indonesian working mothers in this study navigated their roles as professionals and mothers to reconcile the tension in balancing career and mothering. They acknowledge the importance of their role in childcare and feel guilty for not providing the best care for children, such as delaying their accompanying children on online school activities due to their employment responsibilities. Working mothers who engage in a work-from-home arrangement in the Covid-19 pandemic experience higher job pressure than normal since they work overtime each day. They experienced burnout in the form of physical and emotional exhaustion in consequence of the dynamics of work and childcare. Workplace and parenting stress causes working mothers to have erratic emotional states while dealing with their children, which can lead to mistreatment of their children. On the other side, several mothers indicated that they are contented with their jobs, and being a working mother provides value to their lives. With an adequate support system, their employment and motherhood dynamics may be resolved. Future research could be conducted to investigate the types of social support in helping Indonesian working mothers balancing professional and family life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Gratitude expression that this study is part of DPP/SPP Faculty of Social and Political Sciences Universitas Brawijaya stated on the contract number 36/ UN10.F11/PN1/2020. I also like to thank all working mothers in this research for their willingness to be a participant.

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