

Parental Burnout among Working Mothers with Young Children: Study on Working Women in the Informal Sector in Greater Jakarta

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Abstract

Introduction: This research is based on the increasing participation of women in the workforce, particularly in the informal sector, and the dual burden they face as primary caregivers and income earners.

Methods: Using a quantitative approach with a descriptive design, data were collected from 136 working mothers in the informal sector in Greater Jakarta, selected via purposive sampling. The instrument used was the Indonesian-adapted version of the Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Results: The findings indicate that many respondents (61.03%) experienced a high level of parental burnout, with an average score of 93.84 ($SD = 32.97$). The most dominant dimension was emotional exhaustion in the parental role. Burnout levels were found to vary based on demographic factors, particularly the number of children and lack of partner support.

Conclusion: Working mothers in the informal sector with young children are at significant risk of experiencing high levels of parental burnout. This condition is driven by the heavy demands of dual roles, exacerbated by minimal partner support in caregiving.

Keywords: Greater Jakarta, Informal Sector, Parental Burnout, Working Mothers.

INTRODUCTION

Female labor force participation in Indonesia shows an increasing trend, reaching 67.43% in 2024 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). A large portion of them, approximately 64.25%, work in the informal sector. The informal sector is often characterized by low wages, instability, and a lack of legal protection or clear employment contracts. This condition places women in a dilemmatic situation, where they must bear a dual burden (Sipayung et al., 2023): as income earners to support the family economy and as primary caregivers in the domestic sphere. This dual burden is reinforced by the cultural context in Indonesia, which generally still places higher demands on mothers to care for and educate children (Rasdiana, 2022), even tending to normalize the fatigue experienced by mothers as part of their responsibility (Amalia, 2022).

Prolonged pressure from fulfilling the parenting role can trigger the phenomenon of parental burnout. Parental burnout is defined as a syndrome of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion exclusively related to the parental role (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018). This condition is unique and distinct from job burnout or depression. The main risk factors are an imbalance between the demands of the role and the resources available, as well as a lack of partner support (Mikolajczak et al., 2020). The impact of parental burnout is serious, encompassing emotional distancing from the child, neglectful attitudes, and even the potential for violence against children. This is crucial given that the subjects of care are young children (0–6 years old), who are in their "golden age" and highly dependent on stimulation and interaction with parents for optimal cognitive and emotional development (Santrock, 2020).

Although work in the informal sector offers flexibility, the challenge of dividing time and work areas from personal life, coupled with income instability, is suspected to still place mothers at a high risk of burnout. The present study aims to examine parental burnout among mothers employed in the informal sector, a demographic that continues to navigate dual-role challenges despite the inherent flexibility of their work. Investigating this phenomenon is crucial for understanding its impact on maternal mental health—an area frequently overlooked, despite the pivotal role mothers play within both familial and societal contexts. Furthermore, maternal well-being is a critical determinant in fostering optimal child growth and development. This topic is of particular significance given the high prevalence of mothers working in the Indonesian informal economy, alongside existing literature indicating significant variations in well-being associated with this role. It is anticipated that this research will yield novel insights into the psychological challenges these women encounter and identify actionable strategies to bolster their mental health.

Ultimately, the findings are intended to inform the development of more accommodating and supportive policies for working mothers in the informal sector.

METHODS

Study Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive design. This method was chosen to provide a clear picture of the level of parental burnout in the target population. The duration of this study was approximately 6 months, in the greater areas of Jakarta.

Subject and Sampling method

The population in this study consisted of mothers employed in the informal sector who have child/children aged 0–6 years. The demographic characteristics of this population encompassed diverse educational backgrounds, types of occupations, and experiences in balancing employment responsibilities with home-based childcare. According to Badan Pusat Statistik (2025), the number of working mothers in Indonesia continues to rise, compelling many to navigate the competing demands of work and domestic childcare. This upward demographic trend provided the rationale for selecting this population as the primary focus of the present study. Sampling was conducted using a purposive sampling technique to ensure participants met the specified criteria which are working mothers in informal sector with children age 0-6 years old. After the data processing to make sure all respondents fit the criteria, 136 respondents can be included in the study.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out online from April to May 2025 using a Google Form questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed through working mothers' communities and social media.

Instrument

Parental burnout data was measured using the Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA) developed by Roskam et al. (2018) and adapted into Indonesian by Mahanani et al. (2024). This instrument consists of 23 items measuring four dimensions: Exhaustion in Parental Role, Emotional Distancing from the child, Feelings of being fed up, and Contrast with the previous parental self. This adapted version has

been tested and shown to have excellent construct validity (RMSEA = 0.024; CFI = 0.992; TLI = 0.992) and high reliability (Cronbach's α = .96).

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques using JASP application. This analysis was used to present frequencies, percentages, mean values, and standard deviations of the parental burnout scores, both overall and based on demographic data.

RESULTS

Respondent Characteristics

Of the 136 respondents, most were in the productive age ranges of 20–30 years (47.06%) and 31–40 years (46.32%). The majority of respondents were married (96.32%). Most had two children (44.12%) or one child (33.82%). The most common informal professions were traders (online/offline) (22.06%), freelancers (17.65%), and daily instructors (15.44%). The majority of respondents (61.03%) worked less than 8 hours per day and were domiciled in DKI Jakarta (25.74%) and West Java (23.53%).

Level of Parental Burnout

Descriptive analysis of the total parental burnout scores showed a mean score of 93.84 with a standard deviation (*SD*) of 32.97. The score range obtained was quite wide, from a minimum score of 41.00 to a maximum of 150.00.

Table 1. Descriptive Data Scores Based on Item Score Levels

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Shapiro-Wilk	Shapiro-Wilk P-value	Minimum	Maximum
Total Score	136	93.838	32.968	0.930	<.001	41.000	150.000

Based on score categorization (Hidayati & Andriana, 2022), it was found that the majority of respondents fell into the high and medium parental burnout categories:

- a. High: 83 respondents (61.03%)
- b. Medium: 47 respondents (34.56%)
- c. Low: 4 respondents (2.94%)

Table 2. Categorization of Total Parental Burnout Score

Category	Total Score	n	Percentage (%)	Mean
Low	< 48	4	2.94	67.50
Medium	49–80	47	34.56	62.93
High	> 80	83	61.03	114.87

Burnout Description by Dimension and Demographics

Further analysis indicated that the most prominent dimension was Exhaustion in Parental Role.

Burnout scores also showed differences based on several demographic factors:

- a. **Number of Children:** The level of burnout tended to increase with the number of children. Mothers with three children ($M = 45.35$) reported higher exhaustion than mothers with two children ($M = 40.98$) and one child ($M = 36.72$).
- b. **Profession:** Professions with low flexibility or high demands, such as tailors ($M = 45.14$) and part-timers ($M = 43.88$), showed higher exhaustion scores.
- c. **Marital Status:** Mothers with "Widowed" status ($M = 47.00$) showed the highest exhaustion scores, followed by "Divorced" ($M = 42.67$) and "Married" ($M = 39.65$).
- d. **Domicile:** The highest burnout scores were found among respondents in Papua ($M = 56.00$) and North Sulawesi ($M = 54.00$), which may be related to limited access to social support.

DISCUSSION

The elevated average parental burnout scores observed in this study highlight the significant challenges mothers face in fulfilling their dual roles. This finding aligns with Damastuti and Adiati (2022), who noted that societal pressures regarding the ideal mother archetype, compounded by constrained socioeconomic conditions, substantially elevate the risk of burnout. In the Indonesian

cultural context, where mothers are traditionally positioned as primary caregivers, these social expectations amplify the psychological burden on working mothers, despite their contributions to household financial sustenance.

Exhaustion in the parental role emerged as one of the most prominent dimensions of parental burnout. This finding is consistent with Vigouroux and Scola (2018), who reported that mothers experiencing severe fatigue are more susceptible to emotional distress and diminished parenting satisfaction. This vulnerability is further exacerbated by the instability inherent in informal sector employment, characterized by irregular working hours, low income, and a lack of social protection (Putri, 2024). Consequently, the dual-role burden managed by mothers in this structural context serves as a primary catalyst for parental burnout.

The findings further demonstrated that child count was associated with elevated levels of parental burnout. Specifically, mothers caring for more than two children exhibited higher burnout scores. This supports the assertions of Hubert and Aujoulat (2018) as well as Mikolajczak et al. (2018), who identified the number of children as a critical demographic risk factor that intensifies caregiving demands and heightens parental exhaustion.

Maternal age and marital duration also contributed meaningfully to parental burnout levels. Mothers aged 30–40 years reported the highest levels of exhaustion, reflecting a life stage characterized by peak occupational engagement alongside intensive caregiving for early childhood dependents. Additionally, mothers in early-stage marriages (2–5 years duration) demonstrated higher burnout scores, likely stemming from initial adaptive challenges to parental and spousal roles. This outcome concurs with Roskam and Mikolajczak (2020), who identified relational conflict and minimal spousal support as significant predictors of parental burnout. In a local context, Retnowati et al. (2020) similarly emphasized the crucial role of spousal support in mitigating parenting stress among working mothers.

Regarding occupational categories, mothers employed as tailors, daily laborers, or part-time workers tended to exhibit higher parental burnout scores than those working as freelancers or service providers with greater workplace flexibility. This reinforces the findings of Kumari et al. (2024), who highlighted work flexibility as a pivotal protective factor in maintaining work-family balance. Lower occupational flexibility corresponds to a heightened risk of maternal emotional exhaustion.

Beyond individual and work-related variables, environmental context also influenced parental burnout severity. Respondents residing in regions with limited access to socioeconomic

infrastructure, such as Papua and North Sulawesi, tended to report higher burnout scores. This finding reflects the nuanced operation of collectivism within Indonesian culture, which can serve as a conduit for social support yet also generate pervasive social pressure surrounding maternal role expectations (Kumari et al., 2024; Liang et al., 2021). When structural support remains insufficient, cultural expectations exacerbate mothers' psychological strain.

Synthesizing these empirical findings and extant literature, parental burnout among working mothers in the informal sector is shaped by an interplay of internal factors (e.g., number of children, age, marital duration) and external determinants (e.g., job classification, working hours, socioeconomic status, and cultural expectations of intensive mothering). These results underscore the necessity of a multidimensional approach to understanding maternal burnout within complex and diverse societal frameworks like Indonesia.

In addition, open-ended qualitative inquiry ("Do you share parenting responsibilities with your partner?" and "Are there other individuals who assist you in child-rearing?") revealed that a majority of mothers working in the informal sector manage caregiving obligations independently, lacking substantial assistance from spouses or extended family members. Although a subset of respondents reported minor task-sharing with partners—such as escorting children to school or providing brief supervision during night shifts—such support was generally described as sporadic, conditional, and limited. For most mothers, primary caregiving responsibilities rested entirely on their shoulders.

This dynamic underscores the paradoxical nature of informal sector employment: while often perceived as a flexible alternative to formal work constraints, it frequently intensifies dual-role strain. The qualitative data demonstrate that schedule flexibility does not inherently alleviate caregiving burdens. On the contrary, because many mothers work from home or maintain irregular hours, domestic role expectations remain unyieldingly high or even increase. Several respondents noted that their spouses "do not help," are "rarely involved," or "focus solely on work." Even when spousal assistance was present, it was typically restricted to functional logistics (e.g., transportation) rather than shared emotional investment or equitable co-parenting responsibilities, reflecting persistent gender role inequities in domestic labor.

Furthermore, while some mothers reported receiving assistance from domestic workers, parents, or extended kin (e.g., sisters-in-law and neighbors), such support was largely situational and inconsistent. A vast majority of respondents identified as the primary caregiver responsible for executing household tasks single-handedly. This dearth of systematic support constitutes a major

risk factor for parental burnout. Mothers reported severe physical and emotional depletion resulting from the continuous demand to navigate two high-intensity roles concurrently: breadwinner and primary caregiver. Illustrative accounts described mothers breastfeeding while completing work, staying awake at night to attend to children after full workdays, and managing domestic labor without assistance.

These empirical observations reinforce previous literature (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2020; Retnowati et al., 2020) highlighting low spousal support and the absence of stable social support systems as critical determinants of parental burnout. Within Indonesia's cultural matrix, which positions mothers as the ultimate authority in domestic caregiving, societal pressure to perform "perfect" mothering compounds psychological exhaustion. Consequently, these findings highlight the urgent need for a redistribution of caregiving responsibilities within the household and heightened partner involvement. In the absence of sustained practical and emotional support, working mothers—even within flexible informal sectors—remain highly vulnerable to parental burnout.

CONCLUSION

The majority of working mothers in the informal sector with young children experience parental burnout at moderate to high levels, with emotional exhaustion being the most dominant dimension. This phenomenon is driven by a combination of factors, including the demands of dual roles, the number of children, the instability of informal work, and cultural demands. A crucial factor exacerbating this condition is the minimal support and unequal division of parenting roles from partners. These findings indicate the need for practical interventions to increase mothers' awareness of parental burnout symptoms. Advocacy is also needed to encourage active partner involvement in caregiving to protect maternal mental health and support optimal child development.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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