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The Role of Spousal Support in Reducing Parental Stress among Indonesian Dual-Earner Couples

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the direct role of spousal support in reducing parental stress among dual-earner families in Indonesia using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM). Rapid socioeconomic changes have increased parental responsibilities, especially in dual-earner families, heightening parental stress. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, data were collected from 246 dual-earner couples. Parental Stress Scale and Spousal Support Scale were employed to measure parental stress and spousal support, respectively. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis revealed significant actor effects: husband's support significantly decreased wife's parental stress ($\beta = -0.356$, $p < 0.001$), and wife's support significantly reduced husband's parental stress ($\beta = -0.341$, $p < 0.001$). These findings emphasize the critical role of spousal support in alleviating parental stress, highlighting its importance in enhancing family well-being. The study offers practical recommendations for interventions and policies aimed at strengthening spousal support to improve parenting experiences within dual-earner families.
Keyword: Dual-earner families, Parental stress, Spousal support, Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM)

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji secara langsung peran dukungan pasangan dalam mengurangi tekanan keibubapaan pada keluarga berpenghasilan ganda di Indonesia dengan menggunakan pendekatan *Actor-Partner Interdependence Model* (APIM). Perubahan sosial-ekonomi yang cepat meningkatkan tanggung jawab pengasuhan, khususnya dalam keluarga berpenghasilan ganda, sehingga menyebabkan tingginya tekanan keibubapaan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif *cross-sectional* dengan melibatkan 246 pasangan dwigaji sebagai responden. Pengukuran menggunakan *Parental Stress Scale* untuk tekanan dalam pengasuhan dan *Spousal Support Scale* untuk dukungan pasangan. Hasil analisis dengan *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM) menunjukkan adanya efek aktor yang signifikan, di mana dukungan suami secara signifikan menurunkan

parenting stress isteri ($\beta = -0,356$, $p < 0,001$), serta dukungan isteri secara signifikan menurunkan *parenting stress* suami ($\beta = -0,341$, $p < 0,001$). Temuan ini memperkuat pentingnya peran dukungan pasangan dalam mengurangi *parenting stress*, sekaligus menegaskan relevansi dukungan pasangan dalam meningkatkan kesejahteraan keluarga. Penelitian ini menawarkan rekomendasi praktis untuk intervensi serta kebijakan yang berfokus pada penguatan dukungan pasangan guna memperbaiki pengalaman pengasuhan dalam keluarga berpenghasilan ganda.

Kata kunci: Keluarga berpenghasilan ganda, *Parenting stress*, Dukungan pasangan, *Actor-Partner Interdependence Model* (APIM)

INTRODUCTION

Significant changes in family structures in Indonesia over the past two decades have been largely influenced by the increasing participation of women in the workforce. According to Indonesia's Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2024), 49.53% of Indonesian women are now employed as professionals, reflecting a 1.81% increase from the previous year. This shift indicates a clear departure from traditional family roles in which men were the sole breadwinners, moving instead toward a modern dual-earner family model (Sulastri, 2021).

Dual-earner families are defined as households in which both spouses have stable employment and income (Green & Zenisek, 1983; Petriglieri & Obodaru, 2019). In Indonesia, this structure has become more common, particularly since the 1997 economic crisis (Rustham, 2019). While dual incomes offer financial advantages, they also introduce complex challenges related to time management, emotional availability, and shared responsibilities. As a result, parental stress has emerged as a critical issue, especially as both parents navigate multiple demanding roles simultaneously.

Parental stress is defined as a psychological condition that arises when the demands of parenting exceed the parent's available resources—whether in terms of time, energy, or emotional capacity (Holly et al., 2019; Abidin, 1992). This stress can manifest in emotional exhaustion, irritability, and even withdrawal from emotional bonds with children (Chung et al., 2022). In dual-earner families, such stress is often amplified due to work overload and limited family time (Kim et al., 2015; Maghfiroh & Wijayanti, 2021).

One of the most cited protective factors in mitigating parental stress is **spousal support**. This support may be emotional (e.g., empathy and encouragement), instrumental (e.g., sharing childcare and domestic tasks), informational, or affirmational (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Prior studies have consistently shown that parents who feel supported by their partners

report lower levels of parenting stress and more positive relationships with their children (Leidy et al., 2011; Liu & Wang, 2015). However, the quality and impact of such support are often influenced by subjective perception and deeply embedded gender norms, especially within patriarchal societies such as Indonesia (Kwan et al., 2015; Sulastri, 2021).

Many existing studies, however, tend to adopt an individualistic perspective, examining only one partner's experience and failing to account for the relational and reciprocal nature of family stress and support. To address this gap, the present study adopts the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006), which allows for a simultaneous analysis of how an individual's perceived support affects both their own (actor effect) and their partner's (partner effect) levels of parental stress.

Using the APIM framework, this research focuses to examine the direct relationship between spousal support and parental stress among dual-earner couples in Indonesia. By focusing on direct effects only—without including moderating variables—this research seeks to provide a clear and contextualized understanding of how perceived spousal support contributes to individual and dyadic parenting well-being. These findings may help shape more thoughtful, couple-focused interventions that not only support mental well-being, but also strengthen the resilience of parents navigating the demands of dual-income family life.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design to investigate the direct relationship between spousal support and parental stress among dual-earner couples in Indonesia. The Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) was utilized to account for the interdependent nature of dyadic data, allowing simultaneous analysis of actor and partner effects within each couple.

Participants and Sampling

The study involved 246 dual-earner couples (492 individuals) residing in urban areas of Indonesia. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method, with inclusion criteria such as: (1) both husband and wife working full-time or part-time for income, (2) having at least one child aged 0–12 years, and (3) living together in the same household.

The majority of participants were aged between 30 and 45 years. Over 70% of the wives held at least a bachelor's degree, and most families had one or two children. This demographic profile represents a growing segment of middle-income urban dual-earner families in Indonesia.

Research Instruments

Two validated instruments were used to collect data:

1. **Parental Stress Scale (PSS)**

Parental stress was measured using the Parental Stress Scale (PSS) originally developed by Berry and Jones (1995), and translated into Indonesian by Kumalasari et al. (2022). The scale uses several items to assess the level of psychological stress experienced by parents in caregiving roles. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

The reliability coefficients in this study were excellent: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$ for wives and 0.87 for husbands. Composite reliability values were also high ($\rho_A = 0.90$ (wife) / 0.88 (husband), $\rho_C = 0.91$ (wife) / 0.89 (husband)).

2. **Receipt of Spousal Support Scale**

Spousal support was measured using the Receipt of Spousal Support Scale, developed by Dorio (2008) and translated into Indonesian by Rizal, Fikry, and Yasmin (2023). This instrument consists of 20 items that assess emotional and instrumental support perceived from one's spouse.

Responses were rated using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The original instrument reported a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.93$ (Dorio, 2008), and this study found Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$ for wives and 0.90 for husbands. Composite reliability was also strong ($\rho_A = 0.94$ (wife) / 0.91 (husband), $\rho_C = 0.93$ (wife) / 0.91 (husband)).

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using an online and offline questionnaire, distributed via social media and parenting communities. Both partners in each couple were required to complete the questionnaire independently to ensure the validity of dyadic responses. Ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics board, and informed consent was secured from all participants.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 software. The APIM framework was modeled with spousal support as the predictor variable and parental stress as the outcome variable for both husbands and wives.

Actor effects (i.e., the influence of an individual's own perceived spousal support on their own parenting stress) and partner effects (i.e., the influence of perceived spousal support on

their partner's parenting stress) were examined. Significance was tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, and results were reported with path coefficients (β), t-values, p-values, and R-square values for each endogenous variable.

Research Ethics

This study received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), Malaysia, prior to the data collection process. All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, their rights as respondents, and the confidentiality and anonymity of their data. Informed consent was obtained voluntarily through a written agreement before they participated in the survey.

All data collected were kept strictly confidential and used solely for academic research purposes. No personal information was disclosed to third parties. The researcher ensured that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any penalty.

RESULTS

The analysis using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) in PLS-SEM revealed significant actor effects of spousal support on parental stress for both husbands and wives.

- 1) The actor effect of husband's perceived spousal support on his own parental stress was $\beta = -0.341$, $t = 4.539$, $p < 0.001$, indicating a strong negative relationship.
- 2) Similarly, the actor effect of wife's perceived spousal support on her own parental stress was $\beta = -0.356$, $t = 6.675$, $p < 0.001$.
- 3) Meanwhile, no significant partner effects were observed in this model, as the focus of this article is on direct actor effects only.

The model explained 39% of the variance in wives' parental stress ($R^2 = 0.39$) and 33% of the variance in husbands' parental stress ($R^2 = 0.33$), indicating moderate explanatory power.

Path	Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Significance
Spousal Support (Wife) → TK Isteri	-0.356	6.675	0.000	Significant

Spousal Support (Husband) → TK Suami	-0.341	4.539	0.000	Significant
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DISCUSSION

The present findings offer further support for the idea that spousal support is not just beneficial, it's essential in reducing parenting stress in dual-income households. Across both genders, those who feel supported by their partners consistently report lower stress levels linked to their parenting duties. These results are consistent with a growing body of literature that emphasizes the protective function of close relational support in managing role overload, particularly within family systems facing complex demands (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Leidy et al., 2011).

From the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) perspective, the significant *actor effects* observed in this study indicate that one's own perception of being supported is more predictive of their psychological outcomes than their partner's behaviors. This supports the subjective appraisal theory in stress literature, which suggests that perceived availability of support may buffer stress regardless of the actual support received (Thoits, 2011).

The negative path coefficients found for both husbands ($\beta = -0.341$) and wives ($\beta = -0.356$) suggest that the effect of spousal support is equally critical for both genders, despite traditional assumptions that emotional support is more impactful for women. These findings echo Liu & Wang's (2015) study in China, which showed that fathers in dual-earner families who felt emotionally validated by their wives experienced greater involvement and reduced emotional strain in parenting. In line with this, the current results suggest that fathers are no longer passive or peripheral figures in the parenting domain, particularly in urban Indonesian families where gender roles are gradually becoming more egalitarian (Ratnaningsih & Idris, 2024).

Interestingly, although the literature often highlights partner effects in APIM studies, this analysis found actor effects to be dominant. This pattern may be attributed to the psychological salience of internal perception and autonomy in stress regulation. Individuals who perceive their partners as supportive may experience enhanced emotional self-regulation, a stronger sense of competence, and reduced guilt in role performance—factors which collectively mitigate parenting stress (Bodenmann et al., 2006).

Another dimension worth considering is the cultural context. In Indonesia, parenting—especially mothering—is often regarded as a moral or spiritual obligation rather than a negotiable role (Sulastri, 2021). Therefore, receiving support from a spouse may not only lighten the practical load but also affirm one’s identity and social role, leading to increased psychological resilience. For men, who may face increasing societal expectations to be “involved fathers” while maintaining full-time employment, spousal support may serve as a social permission structure that allows them to engage more fully without fear of role conflict or inadequacy.

Furthermore, these results challenge the individualistic bias often found in parental stress research, which tends to isolate mothers or fathers as independent agents. The dyadic approach used in this study provides empirical evidence that parenting is not only a shared responsibility but also a shared psychological experience. This aligns with family systems theory, which posits that changes in one family member’s emotional state or role engagement can influence the emotional climate and functioning of the entire unit (Minuchin, 1974).

The relatively high R-square values in this study (39% for wives, 33% for husbands) indicate that spousal support alone explains a meaningful proportion of variance in parenting stress. While other factors such as work demands, child behavior, and social support networks certainly contribute to parental stress, the present study underscores that the quality of the marital relationship remains a central determinant of psychological well-being in the parenting context.

In practical terms, the results suggest that interventions should not only address individual coping mechanisms or time pressures, but also engage with the emotional and relational dynamics shared between partners. Marital counseling, workplace policies promoting shared caregiving, and parenting education programs can incorporate modules on effective communication, mutual support, and role negotiation to foster more resilient family units.

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms that spousal support plays a significant role in reducing parental stress among dual-earner couples in Indonesia. The results of the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) analysis showed that both husbands and wives who perceived high levels of emotional and instrumental support from their partners experienced significantly lower levels of parenting stress. These actor effects were statistically significant for both genders,

emphasizing that parenting-related psychological well-being is deeply influenced not only by external demands but also by the quality of the marital relationship.

The findings highlight that perceived spousal support is a crucial mechanism in coping with the psychological burdens of parenting. This supports the notion that resilient parenting in modern families depends on mutual support within the couple relationship, regardless of traditional gender roles. The study also contributes to the theoretical development of dyadic family research and provides empirical evidence grounded in the cultural context of Indonesia—a setting that remains underrepresented in global parenting studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For Family Practice and Counseling. These outcomes may inform the design of couple-based parenting and marriage counseling programs that emphasize mutual support, open communication, and equitable role distribution within the family.
2. For Policymakers and Government. Policymakers are encouraged to promote flexible work arrangements, paternity leave, and shared parenting initiatives as part of broader strategies to support psychosocially healthy families, especially those with dual earners.
3. For Future Research. This study focused solely on the direct actor effects of spousal support on parental stress. Future studies are encouraged to explore moderation effects, crossover dynamics, and mediating variables, as well as to examine different types of family structures and stages of parenting.
4. For Community and Parenting Initiatives. Parenting communities and family-focused organizations should provide education and support programs that promote emotional collaboration in parenting, not just practical techniques for child care.

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