

Stress dynamics: A comparative study of housewives and career women

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Abstract

Purpose: Stress is a prevalent psychological phenomenon occurs within individuals from various demographics, with women often facing stressors related to their roles as housewives or career women. This study explores the stress dynamics experienced by the two groups of women.

Method: This study employs quantitative methodology and qualitative methodology. Quota sampling technique used, with characteristic of women age between 20-40 years old, those career women and housewives, with samples of 110 of each groups, located in sub-district of Pasuruan Regency. Stress Scale used to measures stress levels and Questionnaires used to collect the source of stressors and the coping mechanism.

Result: The inter-group t-test analysis showed that in average, Housewives experienced more stress than Career Women. 78% of Housewives and 58% of Career Women experiencing external stressors. The coping mechanism used by Housewives are 61% emotional-focused, and 52% of Career Women used problem-focused.

Conclusion: In conclusion, while in average Housewives shows more stress than Career Women, both groups experiencing higher external stressors such as expectations from family and society, than internal stressors. The topic of stress and how women cope, requires more personal and casuistically approach.

Keywords: *career women; housewives; stress dynamic*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays it is very common for women not only working in the household as a housewives, but also working outside the house as a career women. Housewives is defined as women who manage various kinds of household work, wives (mother) who only take care of various household chores, does not work in the office (<https://kbbi.web.id>). From the same source, Career Women is defined as women who are involved in professional activities, such as in business, office, etc). Characteristics for career women includes: (1) actively carry out activities outside the home (public area) to achieve progress economically and self-actualization; (2) the activities carried out are professional activities (with certain expertise and skills) in accordance with the field in which they are engaged; (3) the field pursued in work is in accordance with her skill/competencies, and can bring material/monetary rewards for advancement in her life, work or position (Utaminingsih, 2019). Traditionally, women are expected to be a housewives, taking care of her family and household. Kartono (2007) stated the role of women in the family includes: (1) as a wife, husband's companion with a sense of love and affection; (2) as a sexual partner, in heterosexual relationship; (3) as a mother and educator, whose creating warm and loving conditions in educating children at home; (4) as a household organizer, which is taking care all the needs in the household.

*Proceeding of International Conference on Healthy Living (INCOHELIV)
(Volume 1, 2024)*

Thus, career women is expected to manage 2 roles, as a professional in her career (outside the home) and as a housewives.

It is believed that being a career-women has a higher level of stress than housewives. Research shows 98,6% of career women experienced moderate level of stress, with 1,4% on a high level of stress, meanwhile 87,8% of housewives experienced moderate level of stress and 12,2% on a low level of stress (Nurhayati, 2022). During pandemic, research by Sihombing (2021) showed the average coping stress for working mothers is higher than the coping stress for housewives in facing online learning.

Other research finds that both career women dan housewives experienced moderate and severe level of stress (Sultanpur, 2021). The later research seems support the finding of previous research by Dibaji, et.al (2017), in terms of stress and emotional home demands, found there were no differences between career women and housewives. These shows that both housewives and career women will experienced stress in all level. However there has not been many research conducted about their stress dynamics, such as the source of stressors and how they cope with stress. Whereas there has been many reported mothers who are depressed because they are in debt, mothers killed their infant.

Psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding the person' resources and endangering their well-being (Lazarus and Folkman, in Berjot & Gillet, 2011). According to Sarafino& Smith (2012), stress is a condition caused by transactions between individual and the environment which creates a distance between demands originating from various situations and the resources of a person's biological, psychological, and social systems. There are two aspects of stress: (1) biological aspects of stress, which are physical symptoms that occur when someone experiences stress; and (2) psychological aspects of stress, psychosocial symptoms that occur when experiencing stress, such as disruptions of cognitive process, emotional reactions, and changes in social behavior. By knowing the dynamic stress of these women, it is hoped to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the stress, which is then useful in designing social intervention in the community.

METHOD

This research variables are Stress as dependent variable, housewives as independent variable (X_1) and career women as independent variable (X_2). Quota sampling technique used with research subject characteristic are women between 20-40 years old, married &/ having children, with quota of 110 housewives and 110 career women, living in Kecamatan Beji, Kabupaten Pasuruan.

For the quantitive method, Stress Scale is used based on biological and psychosocial aspects of Stress by Sarafino & Smith (2012). SPSS 26 was used for data analysis for all measurement of quantitative method. Validity and reliability test of the Stress Scale were carried out, resulting 19 items with reliability coefficient of 0,896. Test of Normality then carried out as a requirement for further parametric statistical tests. Inter-group t-test analysis used to compare the stress level of Housewives and Career Women.

Qualitative method is used to provide data about the stress dynamic, by seeking through the source of stress and the coping strategies used by Subjects of this research. The questionnaire consists of

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(Volume 1, 2024)*

3 open-ended questions, for further understanding about what stress they experienced, and how they cope with the stress. The collected data was then presented into patterns (categorization), to conclusion drawing, as accordance with the steps of data analysis by Miles & Huberman (Sugiyono, 2016)

RESULT

Stress Scale has been tested on 30 respondents, the validity and reliability were calculated using SPSS 26, resulting in 19 valid and reliable items. The instrument then distributed to subjects of research, 110 housewives dan 110 career women. Descriptive data as the criteria for research subject can be seen in the following table.

Table 1
Demographic Data of Subjects

Data	Range	Housewives		Career Women	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Age	20 – 30	65	59	47	43
	31 – 40	45	41	63	57
Marital status	Married	110	100	75	68
	Widowed	0	0	35	32

The collected data then calculated for the distribution of normality, with significance value of $0.064 > 0.05$ which shows the data are normally distributed.

Table 2
Tests of Normality

	Tests of Normality					
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wik		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Y	.089	220	.000	.988	220	.064

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Proceed with the t-test analysis, to see whether there is a significant difference between the two groups of subjects. Sig (2-tailed) is $0.007 < 0.05$, means there is a significant difference in stress, between housewives and career women.

Table 3
Intergroup t-test Analysis

Independent Samples Test								
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
F	Sig.	t	df	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
				Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		

Proceeding of International Conference on Healthy Living (INCOHELIV)
 (Volume 1, 2024)

Independent Samples Test											
										Lower	Upper
Stress	Equal										
	variances assumed	13.945	.000	2.729	218	.007	2.209	.809	.614	3.804	
	Equal										
	variances not assumed			2.729	184.460	.007	2.209	.809	.612	3.806	

We also calculate the Mean and Standard Deviation, to categorized the stress level of each group subjects. The average stress of Housewives are 48.91 > 46.70 the average stress of Career Women.

Table 4
Distribution of Stress Level

Level of Stress	Range	Housewives		Career Women	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
High	$57 \leq x$	2	2%	8	7%
Moderate	$38 \leq x < 57$	108	98%	91	83%
Low	$x < 38$	0	0%	11	10%

Data collected by the questionnaire, put into categorization of type of stressor, source of stress, and coping mechanism used. 78.35% Housewives source of stress are external, with Domestic chores and roles as the highest contributor and financial issues next. 58.23% Career Women source of stress are external, with cultural/social expectation as the highest contributor.

Table 5
Type and Source of Stressor

Stressor	Housewives (%)	Career Women (%)
Internal		
Overthinking	7.36	16
Lack of assertiveness	12.55	13.64
Tendency of perfectionist	1.73	12.12
(Total)	21.65	41.77
External		
Work pressure (career)	0	12.34
Domestic (household chores, children, husband)	21.65	12.12
Financial issues	21.21	8.87
Relationship issues (within family/friends/neighbour)	17.53	7.58
Cultural/social expectation	17.97	17.32
(Total)	78.35	58.23

Proceeding of International Conference on Healthy Living (INCOHELIV)
 (Volume 1, 2024)

Emotion-focused coping mechanism used by 61.02% of Housewives, with accepting the problems as it is (with no concrete action to solve the problem) as the most used mechanism. Whereas 52.11% Career Women used problem-focused coping mechanism, by adapting as the most used mechanism.

Table 6
Coping Mechanism

Coping	Housewives (%)	Career Women (%)
Problem-focused		
Time-management	10.45	14.37
Taking action	11.58	17.46
Adaptation	16.95	20.28
(Total)	38.98	52.11
Emotion-focused		
Distraction	18.64	14.37
Accepting (with no intention to solve the problem)	24.58	17.46
Seeking social support (for comfort & empathy)	17.80	16.06
(Total)	61.02	47.89

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to compare the stress dynamics of Housewives and Career Women. Results shows 98% of Housewives experiencing moderate level of stress, and 2% high level of stress. The source of stress coming for external with 78.35%, with sequentially stress generated by domestic issues, financial issues, and slightly smaller percentage from cultural/social expectations, and relationship issues. Domestic issues includes household chores, children related activities such as homework given from school, children' activities at home/the neighbourhood, and cater the husband' needs. Financial issues generate stress among housewives, because they're relying only from the husband's income. Insufficient income, lacking of financial management, or lacking in communication about financial, is yet to be confirmed. As reported by www.cnbcindonesia.com in the middle of 2022, bad credit for online loans (*pinjol*) was recorded at Rp 563.42 billion, which carried out by women of age 19-34 years. Meanwhile in January 2023 already 60 cases of fraudulent investment recorded. This shows that individual can make careless decisions regarding finances, which then cause endless or repeated stress.

All Housewives in this study are married. Being married seems like a "safe" state, but the questionnaire responses contributed to domestic, financial, and relationship issues. Answers as such, demanding/fussy husband, doesn't want to take part in taking care of household/children, won't defend his wife, and uncertain amount of income. It is common for married couple to live with extended family. Women lives with the husband' extended family, is prone to conflict especially between the daughter in law with the husband' mother (Hasyim & Hidayah, 2019). There are certain expectation from the mother in law to the woman that married to their sons, such as in household chores, financial issues, parenting style, and different mindset/perception toward something. These combine with husband who cannot be a mediator between his wife and mother, or worse, always took his mother' side, is a definite source of stress for the wife.

*Proceeding of International Conference on Healthy Living (INCOHELIV)
(Volume 1, 2024)*

Caroline Moser published a framework of women called Triple Roles Models, women in their daily lives carrying out productive, reproductive, and community/social roles simultaneously (Ismail, 2020). Productive roles includes activities for producing goods/ services for trade. Reproductive role also known as domestic roles, includes household maintenance and upkeep, such as caring for and raising children, providing meal, water, grocery shopping, to family health services. Community/social roles are activities related to events and social services in the community, such as wedding, death, religion and state ceremony/celebration, to activities in community group or local political activities. Productive roles of housewives can be seen as additional or mandatory role, depending on the culture. If the husband's income is considered barely enough, it is commonly agreed that wife must also contribute in the family income. But it is also commonly found, husbands who don't allow their wives to work and just asks them to focus on the household chores and children. Hence most housewives are only doing 2 of the Triple Roles Models of Moser, which are the reproductive and community/social roles. The community/social roles inflict relationship issues. It is common for villagers to assists their neighbour when they have celebration or even death ceremony. If one's does not participate in any form, it will be the talk of the neighbour. Sometimes even one's has been participated, but may lack of something (ex: slow, the meal cooked is not delicious, etc), it will also become the talk of the neighbours.

Internal source of stress shown 12.55% Housewives are unable to proportionally express their mind and needs. They tend to keep it themselves or seeking comfort from other (but not the person they need to address their thoughts and needs). Housewives may also chooses to not express their true thoughts or emotions, for various reasons. They may feel bad for refusing a request for help, avoids being called disobedient, or simply because they can't be assertive. While research found, that individuals who can be direct and respectful, may experience less stress (Mayoclinic.org). It is not easy to be assertive, hence causing stress.

On average, Housewives stress (48.91) are higher than Career Women (46.70). But statistically, Career Women has more amount high level of stress with 7% than of Housewives with 2%, and more on low level stress with 10% and none for Housewives. This shows that Career Women have a slightly wider range of stress, compare to Housewives. 41.77% of the stress were coming from internal, and 58.23% from external. This is aligned with Meeussen & VanLaar (2018) findings of feeling pressure to be a perfect mother leads to parental stress, which then contributed to parental burnout. The pressure to be a perfect mother could come from both internal such as overthinking and tendency of perfectionist, and from external such as cultural/social expectation and domestic issues.

Housewives and Career Women have slightly different percentage on cultural/social expectation contribution to stress. In the research location, the cultural/social expectation is household maintenance and upkeep are strongly women's responsibility, regardless whether they work outside the house (Career Women) or not (Housewives). If you're a Career Women, you are expected to still keeping up the house and children, after work hours. This expectation contributes to the more number of Career Women with high level of stress, than of Housewives. Career Women suits the Triple Roles Models of Moser, where they are expected to be able to balance those three roles.

*Proceeding of International Conference on Healthy Living (INCOHELIV)
(Volume 1, 2024)*

However, there are 11% of Career Women with low level of stress, while no Housewives experienced low level of stress. Apparently this shows that being a fulltime Housewives is indeed stressful. The coping mechanism seems contribute to this results. 61.02% of Housewives used emotion-focused coping. This align with Rosalina & Hapsari (2012) findings of 35% Housewives used emotion-focused coping, 7% used problem-focused coping, and 58% unidentified coping (they used both coping for different issues). According to Lazarus (2006) high-stress occur when a challenge or threat is appraised bigger than individual' resources. Lazarus and Folkman defined coping as constantly changing cognitif and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person. Thus, coping is the effort to manage psychological stress, and there are none coping strategy that's unversally effective or ineffective. Lazarus and Folkman (Maryam 2017) stated that Emotion-focused coping is a way to deal with stress by modify emotional functioning without making effort to change the stressor directly, while Problem-focused coping deal with stress by taking action directed at solution to problem. Housewives most commonly accepting the problems they're facing, with no intention or effort to solve the problem. The second and third most used coping for Housewives are distraction and seeking social support. Possibly because of the monotonous activities Housewives does, doing some activities away from the source of stress seems worked as coping mechanism. The subjects answers on this is quite vary, includes go to the park, square town, eating out, scrolling social media and e-commerce, watching TV/movies, PKK meeting or other social gathering. Although scrolling on social media or e-commerce, might causing yet another/ongoing problem, if they're not being careful. Therefore 98% Housewives experienced moderate level of stress. Whereas 52.11% of Career Women used problem-focused coping, meaning they are actively trying to solve the problem, by adapting and taking action. Adaptation in this study, includes trying to find a different way/approach to solve the problem, also considering and compromising with the resources they have. Taking action (problem-focused) and accepting (emotion-focused) was used by 17.46% of Career Women. These may also contributed to the 10% Career Women experiencing low level of stress. The questionnaire consist of open-ended questions, which allow Subjects to answer freely. One respondent, may write their answer on how they deal with stress, which include both mechanism.

Cultral/social expectation contributed 17.32% of stress on Career Women, and overthinking is the second highest with 16%. Both represented internal and external source of stress in Career Women. As already said in the previous paragraph, that Career Women are expected to be responsible as their role in productive, reproductive, and comunity/social activities. The difference between internal and eksternal source of stress, are narrower for Career Women than of Housewives. Dibaji, et al (2017) research shown that the pressure of work and family role, puts Career Women psychologically vulnerable because of the multiplicity of tasks. Questionnaire result form Career Women stated about the neighbour or even parents in law reaction, when the husband doing household chores, such as feeding the toddler, or cleaning up the house, is seen as source of stress. It is quite common or socially accepted for to have a relax time after work, and not doing household chores or nurturing the children.

There are 32% Subjects that are widowed, which means the Triple Roles Models is more mandatory than additional. Dewi & Saman (2018) study showed that the higher spouse support influenced the lower stress level of dual role conflict stress. Whilst it is unknown about the husband' support in this study, this support definitely unavailable for widowed Career Women. In other point of view, this condition might be a better option than having unsupportive husband.

Proceeding of International Conference on Healthy Living (INCOHELIV)
(Volume 1, 2024)

At least, widowed despite struggling with many roles and obligation, they have somewhat more freedom or independency on decision making or problem solving. In accordance with Lazarus' synthesis on stress (2006), human needs a good balance of demand and resources. Career Women often forced to find a solution to the problem she's experience, and not making effort to solve the problem will only make it worse for the future. For instance, individual' may be an overthinker, but if she's trying to adapting, finding a way to reduce the overthinking, than she will have less problem to think about. Only 8.87% Career Women sees financial issues as a stress. For those widowed, their only options are taking action trying to have a continuous income, or else her children can't eat or go to school. As for Career Women who are married, it may not seen as a problem because they have their own income, regardless the amount given by their husband, or how much he earns. Whereas for Housewives that completely rely on their husband's income, financial can be seen as issues because they don't have other source of financial.

CONCLUSION

It is interesting to learn the dynamic of stress between Housewives and Career Women. In general, both groups are faced with a certain expectation on women's role after marriage. Society still holds a high standar of women' role at home and as a community. They praised women that can juggle with being a Housewives and Career Women, but condemn if the struggle with both roles. Some sees beeing Housewives is less than Career Women because they rely on their husband too much. Yet questioning the choise to work outside the house for Career Women. Dealing with stress in women, requires a more personal, casuistically approach. Both coping mechanism, may be benefit from emotional coaching as well as learning to making priority or list of things they need to solve based on certain analysis.

They way both groups of women appraised situation or people as stress, is also a great findings, so that we discuss about stress within context and cultural background of individual.

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