

The relationship between mothers with careers in higher education and child development in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

الأهداف: تحديد العلاقة بين الأمهات العاملات في التعليم العالي ونمو أطفالهن وتطورهم.

المنهجية: أُجريت هذه دراسة تحليلية ذات تصميم مقطعي، في جامعة ويرانجا، سومينب، إندونيسيا، خلال الفترة من مارس إلى أغسطس 2023م. شملت العينة محاضرات في جامعة ويرانجا، حيث تم اختيار 107 أمهات باستخدام العينة الكلية. تم التعرف على مهنة الأم من خلال استبيان وتم قياس نمو الطفل وتطوره باستخدام اختبار KPSP. استخدمت الدراسة اختبار سبيرمان لتحليل البيانات.

النتائج: بلغ معامل الارتباط 0.512، مما يشير إلى وجود علاقة متوسطة القوة بين الأمهات العاملات ونمو وتطور أطفالهن. تشير النتائج إلى أن توازن الأمهات بين العمل والحياة، وتخصيص الوقت، وغير ذلك من أشكال الدعم لرعاية الطفل تؤثر بشكل كبير على مراحل النمو.

الخلاصة: هناك ارتباط قوي بين الوقت الذي يقضيه الأمهات مع أطفالهن ونمو الأطفال وتطورهم. بالنسبة للأمهات العاملات في المجال الأكاديمي، فإن إنشاء بيئة أسرية أو رعاية داعمة، وتخصيص وقت تفاعلي مخصص وعالي الجودة مع الأطفال يعتبر أمراً ضرورياً. يُنصح الأمهات العاملات بإدارة وقتهن بفعالية لتحقيق التوازن بين المسؤوليات المهنية والأبوية، والانخراط في أنشطة تعزز التطور البدني والعقلي والعاطفي لأطفالهن.

Objectives: To identify the association of mothers with a career in higher education and their children's growth and development.

Methods: This was an analytical study with a cross-sectional design carried out at Wiraraja University, Sumenep, Indonesia, from March to August 2023. The samples were female lecturers at Wiraraja University. A total of 107 mothers were selected using total sampling. The mother's career was identified using a questionnaire and their child's growth and development were measured using child development pre-screening questionnaire. This study used Spearman's test data analysis.

Results: The correlation coefficient was 0.512 indicating a moderately strong relationship between working mothers and their child's growth and development. The findings suggest that time mothers' work-life balance, time allocation, and other support

for caring child significantly impact developmental milestones.

Conclusion: There is a strong correlation between the time spent with children and the child's growth and development. For working mothers in academia, creating a supportive family or childcare environment and creating dedicated, quality time for interaction with their children are essential. Working mothers are encouraged to manage their time effectively to balance professional and parenting responsibilities and to engage in activities that enhance their children's physical, mental, and emotional development.

Keywords: career, child development, child, growth, mother, higher education

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Working mothers have a dual role, namely as a career woman and a home-maker. One of the problems of being a working mother is the inability to give their full attention to their children during the child's rapid growth and development. Mothers play an important role in childcare. Therefore, good parenting is needed so that children can grow and develop optimally.¹ A working mother will still need to play a caregiver role to their children. Working mothers can only take care of their children intensively after they returned from work. Moreover, a mother's role is vitally important in enhancing children growth and development, especially during the kindergarten age. A mother's role is crucial

for children's activities and intelligence development stimulation, as well as children's preparation to attend school.²

Children's brain development emerges rapidly during the early and middle years. Maternal intervention is important for children's cognitive and socio-emotional development.³ Prior studies stated that children with working mothers develop good independence. In contrast, other studies found that children with working mothers are more likely to experience growth problems, such as being underweight. There are still a lack of research that identifies children's growth and development with working mothers in Indonesia. Therefore, there is an urgent need to identify the relationship between working mothers and their children's growth and development. Mother's education and occupation are related to their independence level in caring for their children.⁴ Parents expect their children to grow up intelligently, happily, and with good personalities. Parents are required to have the capability to observe children's development properly and apply good parenting to achieve the developmental milestone.⁵

The environment can temporarily or permanently influence the speed and quality of children's growth and development. Children's surrounding environment is a potential risk to their growth and development. The parenting environment at home involves activities and entire interactions between parents and children, including general parenting tasks and eating patterns.⁶ Family is a critical environment that affects children's development and the closeness between parents and children.⁷ To enhance the growth in children's physical bodies, parents should provide adequate nutritional intake to children (breastfeeding, complementary foods, and weaning food), protect children from infectious diseases (maintain body hygiene, houses, playgrounds, and related tools), as well as protect early and late symptoms from health problems (preventively and curatively).⁸

A prior study found that working mothers had relationships with children's nutritional status. Working mothers are more vulnerable to having children with poor nutritional status.⁹ Children can grow optimally by establishing the parenting pattern of feeding, which includes meal planning, meal preparation, feeding, feeding schedule monitoring, eating utensils, feeding

methods and conditions, introducing new foods, the mother's attitude when the child consumes or refuses the food, and whether the child obtains good nutrition.¹⁰

Children's growth and development are particularly important. Parenting style significantly affects the gross and fine motor skill development, language development, and social skills of children. Parents, especially mothers, influence the growth and development of children.^{11,12} Parents expect their children to grow up intelligently and happily, with good personalities. A working mother, also known as a career woman, must have good management skills in allocating time to carry out the dual roles. The dual roles of working mothers as a career woman and a housewife evoke the ability to manage their time to work and raise children well. Working mothers usually entrust childcare to careers. Mothers take over the tasks of taking care of children intensively after coming home from work. This limitation lightly affects the child's growth and development.¹³

The dual role of a working mother in responding to child growth and development requires effective and efficient strategies and time management.¹⁴ A career mother must wisely divide her time between professional responsibilities and childcare. This includes creating a structured schedule, priorities quality time with children, and making use of important moments such as shared breakfast or bedtime rituals. Support from the spouse through co-parenting, assistance from family member, and the use of technology to stay connected with the child while working are important factors in balancing these 2 roles.¹⁵

Despite facing challenges in time management, the status of working mothers can positively impact children's development. Children of working mothers tend to develop independence early, have role models in terms of professionalism, and exhibit better social adaptability.¹⁶ The quality of meaningful interactions is more important than the quantity of time spent together. Working mothers can maximize their available time by involving children in daily activities, creating learning moments during routine tasks, and establishing meaningful family traditions.¹⁷

To support optimal child development, working mothers need to consider various aspects such as cognitive, motor, language, and social skills.¹⁸ This can be achieved through planned stimulation, shared physical activities, active communication, and opportunities for interaction with peers. With the right strategies and a strong commitment, a working mother can provide quality care that supports optimal child growth and development while still advancing her career.¹⁹ The purpose of this study is to examine the

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relationship between the child growth and development and working mothers in higher education in Indonesia, specially at the Faculty of Health, Wiraraja University, Sumenep, Indonesia. By exploring this dynamic, the study will highlight the challenges and contributions of these mothers, contributing to a better understanding of how their professional roles influence child development outcomes.

Methods. This research was carried out at Wiraraja University, Sumenep, Indonesia, from March to August 2023. A quantitative analysis with a cross-sectional approach was utilized to explore the relationship between working mothers and child development.

The population of this study consisted of 107 working mothers who have children enrolled at Wiraraja University. The sample size was determined based on the total population of working mothers at the university. A total sampling technique was employed to include all eligible participants, ensuring comprehensive data collection. Inclusion criteria included mothers who have children and working at Wiraraja University. However, potential biases may arise from this sampling method, such as selection bias, as only mothers associated with the university were included. Future studies might consider a more diverse sample to enhance generalizability.

This research followed the ethical guidelines established by the committee of ethical approval, Faculty of Health Sciences, Wiraraja University, Sumenep, Indonesia (ref. no.: 004/KEPK-FIK/UNIJA/III/2022). The participation of respondents was based on their willingness to participate in this study.

This study used 2 questionnaires as data collection tools. The first questionnaire was regarding working mothers' knowledge on child's development. The second questionnaire was child development pre-screening questionnaire (CDPSQ). The CDPSQ is a short list of questions addressed to parents as a tool to carry out preliminary screening for children's development aged 3 months to 6 years. The questionnaire consists of 10 questions that must be answered by parents or caregivers regarding the child's developmental state. The CDPSQ is a standard instrument; therefore, there is no need to test its validity and reliability. Age is set by year and month; age 9 months with an excess of 16 days is rounded up to 10 months, while ages 9 months and 15 days are rounded up to 9 months.

The CDPSQ used in this study was the CDPSQ for toddlers aged 12-36 months. The toddlers' growth and development stimulation knowledge questionnaires are

several written questions to obtain information from respondents in terms of parents' personality reports or things they know. The questionnaire in this study is a closed questionnaire; in other words, short and firm answers have been provided using the Guttman scale, so respondents just have to choose. The knowledge questionnaire has been tested for validation and reliability, namely, the results of Cronbach's alpha have a discriminant validity level and a reliability value of 0.91.

Statistical analysis. Data analysis was carried out using univariate and bivariate analyses. Univariate analysis described the working mothers' knowledge regarding children's growth and development, while bivariate analysis examined the relationship between dependent and independent variables. The data analysis used in this study was inferential analysis (significance test), which was used in accordance with the research design. The test used in this study is the Spearman statistical test (ρ).

Results. Table 1 shows that the majority working mothers were at the age of 30-40 years ($n=62$, 58%), while there were 45 (42%) working mothers at the age of 40-50 years. The majority of children participated were at the age of 0-3 years ($n=33$, 31%), while there were 74 (69%) children at the age of 4-6 years old, whereby most of the children are female (53%). The data indicates that most of the working mothers had a master's degree education level ($n=70$, 65%). There were 21 (20%) working mothers with a bachelor's degree, while 16 (15%) of them had a doctoral degree.

The knowledge on child's growth and development, concerning their health, growth and nutrition of children among the working mothers is divided into 3 categories: good, moderate, and low. Table 2 shows that 7% ($n=8$) of mothers have less knowledge of child's growth and development, 35% ($n=37$) of the respondents have moderate knowledge, while 58% ($n=62$) of the respondents have good knowledge of child's growth and development.

Regarding time spent with children, approximately 45% ($n=48$) of the mothers reported spending more than 7 hours/day. Table 1 shows that activities involving the mothers and children are learning (12%), playing together (19%), sleeping (48%), and eating (21%).

Table 2 shows that in 44.9% of the respondents, the mother's knowledge of growth and development regarding the child will be good if the mother spends more than 7 hours per day with their children. The finding suggests that increased time spent with children is associated with better developmental support,

Table 1 - The frequency distribution of respondents' characteristics by parental factors.

Characteristics	n (%)
<i>Mother's characteristics</i>	
<i>Age (year)</i>	
20-30	0 (0.0)
30-40	62 (58.0)
40-50	45 (42.0)
<i>Education level</i>	
Bachelor's degree	21 (20.0)
Master's degree	70 (65.0)
Doctoral' degree	16 (15.0)
<i>Children's growth and development knowledge</i>	
Low	8 (7.0)
Moderate	37 (35.0)
Good	62 (58.0)
<i>Child's characteristic</i>	
<i>Age (year)</i>	
0-3	33 (31.0)
4-6	74 (69.0)
7-9	0 (0.0)
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	50 (47.0)
Female	57 (53.0)
<i>Mother's time spend with children</i>	
Less than (0-5 hours/day)	18 (17.0)
Enough (5-7 hours/day)	41 (38.0)
Lengthy (>7 hours/day)	48 (45.0)
<i>Activity of child</i>	
Studying	13 (12.0)
Playing together	20 (19.0)
Sleep	51 (48.0)
Meals	23 (21.0)

Values are presented as numbers and percentages (%).

highlighting the importance of quality engagement in parenting.

Table 3 shows that the greater the activities carried out by parents with their children, the greater the influence. This value indicates a strong relationship between the children's growth and development and their mothers. The correlation coefficient of 0.512 with a *p*-value of 0.002 suggests a strong relationship between children's developmental outcomes and their mothers' involvement in their lives. Notably, this finding emphasizes the unexpected benefit of working mothers actively participating in their children's growth and development despite their professional commitments.

Discussion. Mothers should spend more time as possible with their children despite working. The limited time can be used as best as possible, for example, by taking their children for a trip during the holidays to become intimate to their child's emotions. This

activity is also useful for fostering children's emotional satisfaction.²⁰ One of the principles of parenting is spending time with children. Spending time with children is vital to creating a supportive environment and atmosphere for their development.²¹

Table 2 shows that the total sample size (N=107) and the correlation coefficient (0.531 with a P-value of 0.035) indicates a strong relationship between a mother's time spent with children and the child's growth and development. Additionally, cultural factors, such as traditional parenting practices, can influence how time is spent and the activities chosen for interaction. A study by Schmidt et al²² revealed that urban middle-class infants experience distal parenting characterized by dyadic play, object stimulation, and positive emotions, while rural farmer infants experience proximal parenting with multiple caregivers, primary care, and emotionally neutral interactions. Mothers' intimacies with children can promote their growth and development, physically, mentally, and emotionally. This result is in line with a prior study that stated an enormous relationship between a child's development and parenting among working mothers.²³ A child's growth is a quantitative change due to external or environmental influences, while a child's development is a process or stage of psychological growth.

The mother's length of working time of more than 7 hours per day would further reduce the intensity of gatherings with their children. Furthermore, mothers would feel tired due to long working hours, which resulted in their inability to take care of their children in a loving and good manner. Cultural expectations may also play a role in how mothers balance work and home responsibilities, influencing their engagement with children. Law number 13 of 2003 on manpower in Chapter V, Article 77, regulates the length of work, which includes 7 hours per day for 6 working days per week and 8 hours per day for 5 working days per week.²⁴

In this study, most of the mothers' education level was a master's degree, which means that the mothers had good knowledge and were able to provide the right stimulation for the child. Prior research explained that the mother's education affects the accuracy of giving complete immunizations to children.²⁵ Complete immunization optimizes children's growth and development.²⁶ In addition, maternal education is related to mothers' behaviour in handling children with diarrhoea, which occurs a lot in children and impacts the children's growth and development.²⁷ This result is in line with another study that showed some mothers have good knowledge of child growth and development. Optimizing children's development can be achieved

Table 2 - Respondents' characteristics: mother's time versus child development.

Mother's time spent with the child	Growth and development knowledge			Total	Spearman's rho test
	Good	Moderate	Low		
Less (0-5 hours/days)	8 (7.4)	5 (4.7)	5 (4.7)	18 (16.8)	0.035
Enough (5-7 hours/days)	4 (3.7)	37 (34.6)	0 (0.0)	41 (38.3)	
Lengthy (>7 hours/days)	48 (44.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	48 (44.9)	
Total	60 (56.0)	42 (39.3)	5 (4.7)	107 (100)	

Values are presented as numbers and percentages (%).

Table 3 - Frequency distribution of respondents' characteristics: child development versus working mothers.

Mothers with career in higher education	Growth and development			Total	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Good	Moderate	Low		
Yes	3 (15.0)	5 (15.2)	4 (7.4)	12 (11.2)	0.002
No	17 (85.0)	28 (84.8)	50 (92.6)	95 (88.8)	
Total	20 (100)	33 (100)	54 (100)	107 (100)	

Values are presented as number and percentages (%).

by managing time, actions carried out, providing the necessary facilities, and having the right information.¹³

The duration of time mothers spend with their children plays a crucial role in enhancing their knowledge of the child's growth and development. The more time spent together, the greater the opportunities for mothers to observe, interact with, and understand various aspects of their child's development directly.²⁸ This direct observation allows mothers to recognize growth patterns, developmental milestones, and behavioral changes as the child ages. This experience provides a practical understanding that complements theoretical knowledge regarding child development.²⁹

However, the quality of interactions appears to be more crucial than quantity alone. For instance, research in various cultural contexts shows that mothers engaging in responsive and stimulating activities, regardless of total time spent, are better at assessing their child's developmental progress.³⁰ This emphasizes the importance of meaningful engagement over mere presence. Additionally, Suskind et al³¹ found that interventions focusing on enhancing the quality of mother-child interactions led to significant improvements in mothers' knowledge of child development, even when the overall time spent together remained constant.

Interestingly, the relationship between time spent and knowledge acquisition is not linear. A longitudinal study by Ratna et al³² revealed that there might be a threshold effect, where additional time beyond a

certain point does not significantly increase maternal knowledge. This finding suggests that cultural and socioeconomic factors, such as access to educational resources, socioeconomic status, maternal education level, and community support, also play crucial roles in shaping a mother's understanding of child growth and development. Furthermore, Bornstein et al³³ highlighted the importance of diverse experiences in enhancing maternal knowledge, suggesting that a combination of direct child interaction, peer discussions, and formal education contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of child development.

Intense interaction between mother and child also creates opportunities for 2-way learning. Mothers not only teach and guide their children but also learn from the child's responses and development. This process encourages mothers to seek further information, consult experts, or share experiences with other mothers, which in turn enriches their knowledge on child growth and development.³⁴ Moreover, quality time together allows mothers to apply their knowledge directly, reinforcing their understanding through practical experience.³⁵

However, it is important to note that the relationship between time spent with children and a mother's knowledge of child growth and development is not always linear. The quality of interaction and active involvement in the parenting process are more important than the quantity of time alone.⁹ Mothers who spend less time but are actively engaged and actively seek information may have better knowledge compared to those who spend more time but are less involved.

Therefore, focusing on culturally relevant, meaningful, responsive, and educational interactions during time spent with children is the key to improving a mother's knowledge of child growth and development.³⁶

According to our assumptions, to grow and develop optimally, mothers must gain knowledge on their children's growth and development. Information regarding the typical behavior of children according to their age is important. This information would make mothers recognize how to stimulate their children. The stimulation must be supported by the available facilities and the time allocated to the child because of the mother's working schedule. Time management means managing time according to current desires and needs.³⁷ This study result is similar to a research carried out by Ziliwu et al⁹ regarding the effect of time management on emotional intelligence. The research found that there was a positive influence of time management on children's emotional intelligence. The strength of the influence of time management on emotional intelligence is moderate (44.0%). The children's emotional intelligence is determined by their mother's time management.³⁸

This results of study indicated that the greater the activities implemented by parents together with their children, the greater the impact. Most mothers spend time with their children in doing activities like sleeping, eating, and playing. This activity forms the children's growth and development emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. Working mothers had limited time to take care of their families, especially their children. They often do not know how much further their children are growing and developing. Working mothers usually transfer the task of childcare to caregivers while they are working and take care of children intensively after coming back from work.³⁹

In contrast, a study by Berliana et al²⁵ showed that child neglect occurs regardless of whether a mother is working or not. This result is related to the time spent caring for children at home. This emphasizes the importance of exploring cultural and socioeconomic contexts that may influence childcare practices and perceptions of neglect. However, mothers are susceptible to experiencing fatigue and stress, which could lead to the risk of neglecting their children physically or emotionally.²⁵

Career mothers have dual roles, namely as working mothers and as housewives. Cultural expectations regarding motherhood and work can significantly impact how mothers navigate these roles, potentially affecting their children's development. Mothers who are able to manage their roles well, will impact the growth

and development of their children. Mothers failure to carry out their dual role will also affect the growth and development of their children negatively by causing them to experience physical, emotional, and social disorders.

Working is an activity carried out to meet the needs of life and improve family welfare. Every mother has her own reasons for choosing to work rather than be a housewife. Kartini et al⁴⁰ stated that there are 3 reasons mothers choose to work: economic, emotional, and psychosocial demands, and to increase personal satisfaction. The motives for working mothers in this study were divided into 2 categories, namely financial needs and individual satisfaction. Financial needs were identified based on participant statements that mothers wanted to support the family's financial needs.¹³

Financial needs relate closely to socioeconomic status, which affects children's developmental opportunities. A previous study examined the meaning of work for women entrepreneurs.²³ The study found several findings regarding the mother's reasons for working. One of the reasons for mothers to work is economic conditions. The mother's role in fulfilling the basic needs of children impacts their development. A child will experience growth and development disorders if the mother's role is less or not successfully carried out, but if the mother's role is successfully carried out, then the child can grow and develop optimally.³⁹

The relationship between a child's growth and development and working mothers is complex and multifaceted. Research suggests that maternal employment can have both positive and negative effects on children's development, depending on various factors such as the quality of childcare, work hours, and the mother's job satisfaction. Some studies indicate that children of working mothers may benefit from increased family income, exposure to diverse social environments, as well as positive role modelling of work ethic and independence. However, concerns exist regarding potential reductions in parent-child interaction time and its impact on early childhood development. A longitudinal study found that maternal employment during infancy was associated with lower cognitive scores at age 4, but this effect disappeared by age 7.⁸ Conversely, maternal employment during the toddler years (ages 1-3) was linked to higher cognitive scores at age 7.

The quality of parenting and childcare arrangements plays a crucial role in mediating the effects of maternal employment on child growth and development. A study emphasized the importance of quality time over quantity, suggesting that engaged and attentive parenting during

non-work hours can significantly support positive child development outcomes for children of working mothers.⁸ Mother-child interaction is determined by the intimacy quality that exists between them. Working mothers with limited time must maximize their interactions. Research comparing various cultural contexts suggests that mothers who effectively manage their time can achieve optimal developmental outcomes for their children, potentially surpassing those of stay-at-home mothers who struggle with time management. Thus, a mother's ability to spend quality time with their children is one of the skills that must be acquired and continues to be developed.⁴¹ Mothers must have the following abilities: parenting, providing nutrition, and good communication with children and partners. This ability can be obtained through workshops or training.²⁵

Study limitations. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences between mothers' time spent with children and their knowledge of child development. Self-reported questionnaires may introduce bias, as responses could reflect social desirability rather than true beliefs. The sample's focus on a single university limits generalizability to broader populations and diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, factors such as the quality of interactions and external support systems were not thoroughly examined, which could influence child development outcomes. Future research should address these aspects for a more comprehensive understanding.

In conclusion, there is a strong correlation between the duration of time spent with children and the child's growth and development. There is a strong relationship between children's growth and development and the mother's career. Career mothers are expected to manage their time and spend it with their children. Working mothers who have children should encourage activities that make their children happy and cheerful to enhance their growth and development, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. To further enrich this field of study, future research could explore the impact of specific parenting styles and the role of external support systems on child development outcomes. Longitudinal studies could also be beneficial to assess changes over time and the long-term effects of maternal employment on children. Furthermore, investigating the influence of socioeconomic factors and cultural contexts would provide a more comprehensive understanding of these dynamics. The time spent with children can be ensured to be of greater quality, even with a limited quantity.

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