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Original Article

## Being a Mother, Student, and Educator: Graduate Student-Mothers' Parenting Experience During COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract.** COVID-19 pandemic has been a life-changing experience in many families, affecting parents whose current responsibilities are not only being caregivers, but also educators to their children who are forced to learn from home. This situation deeply affects student mothers who have multiple roles at home, which are maintaining a postgraduate study, being housewives, and accompanying their children in online learning. This study aims to explore the lived experience of student mothers in parenting their school-age children during the pandemic, which is viewed from the quality of parenting (positive and negative parenting) and parenting stress perceived by mothers during the home learning activities. The participants were four mothers who are currently undergoing postgraduate study and have children enrolled in kindergarten and primary school (grade 1-3), and learning from home during the pandemic. The method used is qualitative, with an exploratory approach. The data were obtained through online semi-structured interviews and processed using thematic analysis methods. There are 7 themes emerged from the results, which are: 1) balancing multiple responsibilities, 2) experience in educating children from home, 3) adjusting parent expectations, 4) changes in social relationships, 5) agreements about screen time, 6) eating behaviors and physical exercises, 7) setting up new routine. These themes which will be discussed further, along with their implications for the parents' psychological well-being.

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**Keywords:** COVID-19; learning from home; pandemic; parenting; qualitative research.

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### Introduction

The Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic has changed lives in 219 affected countries, including Indonesia. The Indonesian Government's policy to break the chain of the spread of the corona virus through Regulation of Government of The Republic of Indonesia Number 21 Year 2020 regarding Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) in the Context of Acceleration in Handling COVID-19 (*Peraturan Pemerintah (PP) Tentang Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar Dalam Rangka Percepatan Penanganan Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*, 2020) has led to major changes in various aspects of daily life. This regulation has limited activities in public places, including schools. A similar policy was also issued by the Minister of Education and Culture, who instructed Learning from Home activities for children who attend school from early childhood to tertiary education, through Letter of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 36962/MPK.A/HK/2020 regarding online learning and working from home to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (*Surat Edaran Mendikbud:*

*Pembelajaran Secara Daring Dan Bekerja Dari Rumah Untuk Mencegah Penyebaran Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19), 2020).*

Schools closure and remote learning during the pandemic has brought many changes in parenting roles. A study involving parents of primary school age children in Bandung revealed that the role of families in parenting and educating their children has become increasingly important during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kurniati et al., 2020). Most Indonesian parents who previously depended on formal schools for handling their children's education (Rosdiana, 2006) are now facing new challenges to assist their children's remote learning from home (Kurniati et al., 2020).

Having to adjust to multiple changes at the same time, parents are facing risk of elevated psychological stress during the pandemic. This condition is further exacerbated by pandemic-related difficulties such as job loss, which leads to parents' inability to cover basic needs (Mazza et al., 2020; Patrick et al., 2020). Furthermore, this will limit the capacity of parents to provide high-quality care, reflected through lower parental responsiveness, increased rigorous care, decreased positive parenting, and uninvolved parenting. Current studies have identified positive relationship between the parents' psychological stress during the pandemic and that of their children (Davico et al., 2020; Mazza et al., 2020; Patrick et al., 2020).

Exposure to stressors at an early age, such as poverty, family conflicts, and mental disorders in parents, not only have a negative impact at the time of the incident but can also disrupt the mental health of children throughout their life (Shonkoff et al., 2012). In line with that finding, children and adolescents are facing more risk to acquire long-term negative consequences from this pandemic (Shen et al., 2020) compared to adults (Singh et al., 2020).

However, not all children who are exposed to stressors experience significant health risks. Supportive parenting relationships is one of the factors that can prevent the negative impacts of stressors on children, which can contribute to children's neurobiological and socioemotional development (Fisher et al., 2016). Supportive parenting is a consistent and significant protective factor in increasing children's resilience to stress (Flouri et al., 2015). This type of parenting practices can be shown through positive parenting strategies, which consist of dimensions of parenting related to healthy child development, namely supportive parenting, providing limitations, and proactive parenting (McEachern et al., 2012). Positive parenting includes behaviors such as setting up routines effectively, engaging in joint-play activities, praising and showing warmth to children, which will increase prosocial behavior in children (Gardner et al., 2003). Positive parenting reduces behavior problems in children and protects children from the effects that come from chronic stressors, such as poverty and rejection from their peers (Luby et al., 2013).

The opposite of positive parenting is negative parenting strategies, which consist of two dimensions, namely over-reactivity and laxness. Over-reactivity is the tendency of parents to respond to their children's difficult behaviors with harsh and angry attitudes, while laxness is the tendency to ignore or not taking disciplinary actions when the children show problematic behaviors (Arnold et al., 1993). Over-reactivity and laxness are associated with the emergence of mental health problems in children and stressors such as economic constraints (Hutchings et al., 2007).

COVID-19 pandemic can affect parenting behaviors, such as warmth and criticism shown by parents to children. Warmth is a major dimension in sensitive parenting behavior, and can include acceptance, support, and positive involvement with children (Epkins & Harper, 2016). Meanwhile, criticism is defined as an expression of negative attitudes, rejection, or dissatisfaction with children (Hickey et al., 2020). The psychological stress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic can affect parenting behavior, which is indicated by the attitude of parents who are more critical of children, more irritable, or not emotionally involved (insensitive and not being supportive of their children) (Pottie & Ingram, 2008). Previous research have shown that positive mood from family members is closely related to warm

family interactions, whereas negative mood is associated to not being involved in family interactions (Bai et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the pandemic can also trigger parenting stress, which is consisted of three domains: Stress related to the role of parenting, stress related to the quality of the parent-child relationship, and perceptions of children's difficult behaviors (Abidin, 1990). High parenting stress has various consequences for children's mental health, such as increased risk of child abuse, obesity, and externalizing behavior problems (Baker et al., 2005). Higher parenting stress is also associated with more dysfunctional parent-child interactions, including lower parenting sensitivity and higher attachment patterns (Jarvis & Creasey, 1991).

In addition, mothers are affected by these challenges the most, especially the ones who have multiple roles, such as student-mothers. The burdens of COVID-19 within academia are unevenly greater on mothers (Fulweiler et al., 2021), because not only they are expected to be the main caretakers of their children, but they are also required to manage multiple academic duties, such as conducting research and service, in the same manner as the others do (Myers et al., 2020; Staniscuaski et al., 2020). As a result, the COVID-19 has taken a disproportionate toll on many of these mothers' productivity and mental health (Fulweiler et al., 2021).

Therefore, this research intended to explore the life experiences of student-mothers who are pursuing postgraduate study, in parenting their school-age children during the pandemic. The parenting aspect is viewed from the quality of parenting (positive and negative parenting) and the stress of parenting perceived by mothers during learning from home. Current studies related to parenting during the pandemic in Indonesia are generally focused on the educational aspects of learning activities itself and have not explored the psychological factors of mothers with multiple roles, such as student-mothers.

## Method

### Participants

The participants of this study were four Indonesian mothers who are pursuing postgraduate study (master or doctoral study) in Indonesian universities. They have at least one child who are attending kindergarten or primary school (grade 1-3) from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Sampling Procedures

Participants were obtained through the convenience sampling technique, in which the mothers and the first author are a part of the same scholarship awardees group in WhatsApp. The selected participants were asked by the first author via WhatsApp personal chat about their consent to attend online semi-structured interview conducted in Google Meet. After they agreed to participate, the first author set up the interview time together with the participants. The participant were then given souvenirs as a token of appreciation after they completed the interview.

### Materials and Apparatus

The interview guide was created by including questions which use neutral words and intended to explore parenting practices (positive and negative parenting, warmth, and criticism) carried out by participants, as a mother, who are forced to learn from home during the pandemic. The questions seek to explore affective, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual aspects of parenting. These are some of the interview questions: "How do the changes of arrangements in your study and your child's schooling during the pandemic affect the way you parent your child?" (cognitive), "how do you feel when you are

dealing with your child's difficult behavior?" (affective), "how do you respond to your child's difficult behavior?" (behavioral), "Did your (religious) belief help you deal with problems related to parenting during the pandemic?" (spiritual).

### Procedures

This qualitative research was conducted using semi-structured interviews. Each person who met the participant criterion of this study was contacted individually via WhatsApp messages by the author. Informed consent was given before the interview, which included description of the authors' identity, the purpose of the study, benefits, and guarantees of data confidentiality. After the participants agreed to participate, the author scheduled online interviews with the participants.

Interviews were conducted through online meeting platform (Google Meet) and recorded with the participants' consent. Each participant was interviewed once for 60-90 minutes on November 2020. The research data was recorded online (in the form of audio and video recordings), which was converted into verbatim transcriptions.

### Design or Data Analysis

The data contains subjective experiences of each respondent regarding their parenting experience during the pandemic. The data were thematically analyzed using grounded theory from the abstraction of the participants' answers. This was done by the first author using guides from Braun and Clarke (2006).

## Results

This study generates result regarding parenting experience of student mothers whose children are attending school from home during the pandemic. This section consisted of the participants' identity and results obtained from the data analysis.

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Participants

Criterion	Participants			
	U	B	M	T
Level of study	Master	Doctoral	Master	Doctoral
Semester	1	3	1	3
Profession (Prior to study)	State civil apparatus (ASN)	State civil apparatus (ASN)	State civil apparatus (ASN)	Lecturer (private institute)
Child's Education Level	Kindergarten (TK-A)	Primary school (grade 3)	Kindergarten (TK-B)	Primary school (grade 1)
Type of School	Private (Islamic)	Private (Islamic)	Private (Islamic)	State School
Gender of Child	Girl	Boy	Girl	Girl
Child's Birth Order	Second	Second	First	Second
Type of Online Learning	Online	Online	Online	Blended (Online, Offline)

As shown in Table 1, all participants have two children, are settled in Java island, are currently married, and the majority are accompanied by their husbands in parenting their children (except for T, whose husband often travels to other cities for work). In addition, M receives help from an extended family member to care for her children when she is attending

online lectures during the day. Furthermore, T lives in a small region (regency/*kabupaten*) compared to the other participants who live in big cities. Based on the classification released by the government, the regency itself belongs to the green zone category during the pandemic, therefore the school deemed that it was safe enough to conduct learning using blended method, which combined online with offline methods.

**Table 2.** Summary of Results

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Responses from Participants (U, B, M, T)</b>
Balancing multiple responsibilities	Some mothers faced new studying and childcare arrangements at home, as they are expected to supervise their children's studying activities and attend online lectures at the same time ( <b>B, T</b> ). Other mothers faced challenges to navigate between graduate school assignments and responsibilities at home, and thus, made them sacrificed sleeping hours at night to finish campus assignments ( <b>M, U</b> ). The mothers experienced angry outbursts several times when multitasked (doing their study work and accompanying children's online learning at the same time) ( <b>B, M, T</b> ).
Experience in educating children from home	The mothers felt increased parental burden as their children received shorter duration of schooling in virtual format several times a week ( <b>U, B, M</b> ). Some mothers received links and assignments on online learning platforms ( <b>B, U</b> ), while the others received printed learning materials from the school teachers ( <b>M, T</b> ). Some mothers were disappointed regarding the online learning methods, due to the lack learning facilitation and feedback ( <b>B, T</b> ). The children refused to study or do their assignment due to the lack of interest ( <b>U, B, T</b> ). The child asked to do less schoolwork than what was required ( <b>M</b> ).
Adjusting parent expectations	Did not set a high expectation upon children's learning performance ( <b>U</b> ). Let the child choose what subject to study at home, then gave playtime after the obligatory schoolwork is completed ( <b>T</b> ). Did not pressure their child to do schoolwork perfectly ( <b>M</b> ). Told children that it is okay to slow down and ask the teachers for more time to do the assignment ( <b>B</b> ). Understood how the change in the effectiveness of the learning environment impacted child's learning process ( <b>M</b> ). Accepted the current virtual learning process ( <b>B, T</b> ). Increased efforts in teaching their children instead of blaming the school ( <b>M, U</b> )
Changes in social relationships	Concerned about changes in their children's social relationships with their peers during online schooling ( <b>U, B, M</b> ). Child faced difficulties in getting to know classmates virtually ( <b>M</b> ). The child wanted to interact and play with their friends in offline school ( <b>U, B</b> ). A closer relationship within family during the pandemic ( <b>U, B, M, T</b> ). Ability to supervise child's development more frequently ( <b>B</b> ). Improved bonds between mother and child through family activities in the pandemic ( <b>U, T, M</b> ).
Agreements about screen time	Concerned about increased screen time and risk for viewing contents that are not child-friendly ( <b>U, B, M</b> ). Mothers created agreements which include daily limits on the use of gadgets for entertainment and filters child's access to online contents ( <b>U, B, M</b> ).
Eating behaviors and physical	There are reduced physical activities and the increased frequency of eating during the pandemic ( <b>B, M, T</b> ).

exercises	Some have attempted to improve their family health through physical exercises with their families ( <b>B, M</b> ). A mother rarely allocated time to exercise due to exhaustion, but she still moved around her city to do her task as an Islamic spiritual teacher ( <b>T</b> ).
Setting up new routine	The mothers have established new routine to spend time and increase bond with their children, such as through gardening activities and spending weekend in nature with their children ( <b>U, B, M, T</b> ). Other activities that the mothers do with their families include praying and recite or memorize the Islamic holy book together ( <b>B, T</b> ). Some mothers also involve their children in daily household chores ( <b>U, B</b> ).

Table 2 shows the themes emerged from the interviews with postgraduate student mothers, which are: 1) balancing multiple responsibilities, 2) experience in educating children from home, 3) adjusting parent expectations, 4) changes in social relationships, 5) agreements about screen time, 6) eating behaviors and physical exercises, 7) setting up new routine. These themes will be discussed further in the next section.

## Discussion

### Balancing Multiple Responsibilities

All mothers experience disruption in living their daily lives, especially when they must balance responsibilities as a mother, graduate student, as well as home educator who accompanies their children in online learning during the pandemic. B and T, who started their doctorate study before the pandemic, had to adapt with the new studying and childcare arrangements at home. They had to supervise their children's studying activities and attend online lectures at the same time. Both B and T were also overwhelmed with the lunch break schedules in between their online lectures, which they found exhausting at times because they had to multitask. Not only did they have to prepare and cook the food for themselves and their children, but they also had to perform *Dzuhur* prayer during the break. B said that sometimes she opted for online food delivery services when she did not have time to cook during the lunch break.

Despite having adjusted to the disruption in daily activities during the pandemic, two participants (M and U) who started their master study several months after the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic still faced challenges to navigate between their graduate school assignments and responsibilities at home. It took them quite a while to adapt with the time management in graduate school, which is quite different with the situation in their workplace. As a result, both M and U had to put a great number of adjustments in the beginning of their study, one of which was by sacrificing sleeping hours at night to finish their campus assignments. Furthermore, M said that she was initially having a hard time in allocating extra time to do online group projects and discussions with other students in her class, especially when it coincided with her time to take care of her children. She eventually overcame this problem by setting up the online discussion at night, after her children's bedtime.

The mothers' experiences above are in line with the findings that the number of childcare and housework during the pandemic was increasing for many parents (Craig & Churchill, 2021). This was experienced especially by B and T who are managing their study, childcare, and housework alone during the day, with major emphasis of exhaustion in managing housework during the lunch break. Meanwhile, M and U's concerns are more related to managing time in doing their campus assignments and taking care of their child. According to prior research, the challenging and uncertain



situation during the pandemic could increase the stress and fear level in parents, as well as decrease their capacity for time management and planning (Garbe et al., 2020). All mothers in this study experience daily activities during the pandemic that are centered at home, which lead to a higher chance for them to experience mental exhaustion (Goldberg et al., 2021).

B, M, and T expressed that they experienced angry outbursts several times when they have to multitask between doing their study work and accompanying their children in online learning at the same time. B remarked that she feels stressed out when her son needs to be reminded to do his schoolwork, when she was keeping up with her online lectures at the same time. M said that such outbursts happened when she felt that her daughter was underperforming, and she was pressuring her daughter to do better work. T shared that her anger was triggered by her daughter's anger and refusal to do schoolwork when she had something else to do, and thus, could not assist her daughter in learning from home at the time. These findings are in line with previous research which suggested that parents have higher chance to experience stress when they face difficulties in supporting their children's learning in the pandemic (Spinelli et al., 2020). Interestingly, the stress experienced by parents can be sensed by children, which in turn may display their worries in behaviors that may be interpreted by their parents as misbehavior, oppositional/defiant behavior, and temper tantrum, such as becoming more fussing and struggling to focus or engage in play (Imran et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, U stated that she sometimes feels deep sadness when she worries about how this pandemic, which has not ended, will impact her children in the long run. A finding suggests that worries about daily life is resulted from a fast transition from conventional learning to virtual one (Lau & Lee, 2020). Parents tend to experience anxiety that stems from uncertainties regarding the time when life will return to normal (Daniel, 2020).

B felt that her stress was alleviated when her son's school listened to the parents' concerns and proceeded to provide parents with the option of morning or evening online class sessions for those. She feels so much better now that she has alternatives whenever she cannot make it to morning's class due to her campus schedule. Previous study shows that parents feel less stress when they are provided with better support to guide their child's learning (Lau & Lee, 2020).

Some mothers use different ways to cope with their stress. While M uses sports as her main outlet to release her stress, U, T, and B described that religious coping help to lessen their negative emotions. B said that her husband also gives Islamic advice to the whole family after their prayers together at home. U felt that praying and reading the holy book helps her in getting through her worries about the pandemic. Meanwhile, T feels that the sermon from a spiritual teacher (*ustadz*) had helped her in alleviating the pandemic-related stress, especially the one related to death anxiety. T said that her stress was lessened and thus, she was able to enjoy her life more after she remembers that death is a certain thing that will happen to everyone. Moreover, this is also consistent with the prior studies which found the inverse association between spirituality and death anxiety, meaning that low level of death anxiety is related to high level of spiritual well-being (MacLeod et al., 2019).

### Experience in Educating Children from Home

Mothers also talked about their experience in taking new role as educators of their children's learning during the pandemic. Consistent with previous research, mothers perceived online learning during the pandemic as a challenging experience ((Dong et al., 2020). During the learning process at home, participants face some difficult behaviors displayed by their children. M shared that her daughter asked to do less schoolwork than what was required, while B, U, and T remarked that their child refused to study or do



their assignment due to the lack of interest. Prior studies found that lack of concentration and interest in children is one of the main difficulties related to children's learning at home reported by kindergarten and primary school parents (Lau & Lee, 2020). These uncooperative behaviors might also have relation with the distractions that exist at home (Garbe et al., 2020).

All participants' children receive shorter duration of schooling in virtual format several times a week and daily individual task assigned to each child, usually via parents' WhatsApp group or Google Classroom platform. In addition, T's daughter received blended learning, consisted of daily assignments which are given via WhatsApp, combined with offline small group learning consisted of maximum five students (twice a week). This method was deemed possible due to the 'green zone' status and the rural location of the school. Another factor that contributed to this blended method is the students' characteristics in the area, many of whom comes from low-income families and experience difficulties in keeping up with the virtual learning due to the lower levels of information and communication technology literacy (Scherer & Siddiq, 2019).

All mothers in this study remarked that most, if not all, part of the virtual learning was conducted using resources or materials that are available online or prepared by the teachers. B and U said that the teachers usually shared links and assignments on online learning platforms, while T and M stated that their children's teachers gave assignments based on printed learning materials. This condition made the online learning process is largely noninteractive (Lau & Lee, 2020), and seem to only provide "busy work" for their children, which can have negative impacts on students' academic abilities (Snelling & Fingal, 2020). As the online learning format did not facilitate learning in most kindergarten and primary school students, they were unable to work independently and required assistance from their caregivers to finish their schoolwork (Lau & Lee, 2020). Therefore, the mothers in this study have additional role as their children's primary social learning partners. They are the ones who facilitate, supervise, and assist their children in learning and doing schoolwork.

B and T expressed their disappointment regarding these online learning methods, which clearly lack learning facilitation and feedback. They feel that the monotone learning process do not motivate their children to complete their schoolwork, and often increase the parental burden at home. This finding is consistent with the prior study, which discovered that parents who do not receive relevant support tend to feel pressured and unsatisfied with the learning process (Lau & Lee, 2020).

### **Adjusting Parent Expectations**

The mothers voiced the changes in their expectations related to their children's learning during the pandemic, such as by becoming more accepting of children's learning attitudes and school conditions that do not match their expectations. U said that she viewed this year as a "bonus year" for her children, so that she does not put a high expectation upon learning performance, especially for her child who is in kindergarten. T shared that she thinks it is enough for her child to complete the obligatory schoolwork, then she gives her daughter playtime and the freedom to choose what subject that she wants to learn from home. B and M said that they do not pressure their child to do schoolwork perfectly. B said that she tried to show her understanding to her son's struggles by telling him that it is okay to slow down and ask for more time to do the assignment if there is no other way around.

M said that she started to understand that the change in the effectiveness of the learning environment might have impacted her child's learning process. B and T stated that they tried to accept the current learning process, as this might be the most that the teachers and schools can do right now. Instead of blaming the shortcomings from the school's part, M and U said that they tried to increase their own efforts in teaching their

children. M started to teach her daughter several days before the deadline, so that her child will be confident in answering the teacher's question during the online live teaching session. U learned about the topic that her child was studying by browsing the internet, so that she can assist her daughter in doing schoolwork.

Although the mothers feel tired and unhappy with the conditions of these online learning, they try to accept the conditions that they are facing. This form of acceptance, which is referred to as a "no-win" situation, has been associated with improvements in the psychological condition of the parents. Accepting that there is no simple solution to the problem at hand can be an internal source of resilience for mothers (Goldberg et al., 2021).

Altering expectations is one of the ways that can help mothers to cope with the pandemic and its aftermath. It is the basis of psychological flexibility, which is defined as the ability to adapt and change to meet situational demands (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). Psychological flexibility can help parents deal with stress and uncertainty, so that it becomes a support for mental well-being in the family during the pandemic (Coyne et al., 2020).

### Changes in Social Relationships

All participants, except T whose child receives blended learning, voiced concerns about changes in their children's social relationships with their peers. M described how it was hard for her daughter who is in kindergarten to get to know her classmates virtually. B and U reported that their children were getting tired with the virtual school and expressed their willingness to go to offline school so that they can interact and play with their friends face to face. Research shows that school closure and separation from peers can be a source of anxiety and stress in children (Imran et al., 2020).

On the other side, the mothers described a closer relationship within their family during the pandemic. B stated that she was elated to be able to supervise her son's development more frequently in the pandemic. M described how being with her daughter for almost 24 hours has helped her in getting to know her child in ways that she never experienced before, and that it also improved their bonds. U commented that the activities that they do together in the pandemic had increased the bonding between her and her daughters. This improved relationship in the nuclear family can be considered as an advantage from the pandemic (Fegert et al., 2020). Furthermore, high levels of closeness of parents to their children is also related to the low levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (Wu & Xu, 2020).

### Agreements about Screen Time

As children are confined to their homes during the pandemic, their screen time has increased manifold (Imran et al., 2020). Three mothers (B, M, and U) whose children's learning during the pandemic is fully conducted online voiced concerns about increasing screen time, which is also accompanied by concerns about their children's physical health and risk for viewing contents that are not child friendly. Prior studies showed that high amount of sedentary screen time without proper adult supervision leads to a greater risk for health problems and exposure to inappropriate content and exploitation in children (Bruni et al., 2015).

Thus, the mothers are creating agreements with their children regarding screen time. The agreements generally put limitation regarding screen time outside the context of learning activities or completing schoolworks. Mothers impose daily limits on the use of gadgets for entertainment, as well as filtering the online content that their children access. Previous studies revealed that parents should communicate with their children to set boundaries on media use and co-view material so that appropriate monitoring can be offered (Zaman et al., 2016). Involving children in the agreements are in line with

positive parenting strategies, by providing boundaries yet remaining supportive and providing opportunities for children to be actively involved (McEachern et al., 2012).

### Eating Behaviors and Physical Exercises

Physical health is also one of major concerns expressed by the mothers. Three mothers (B, M, and T) revealed that they are experiencing reduced physical activities and the increased frequency of eating during the pandemic. B and T said that the combination of those two factors have led to weight gain. A study shows that environmental and psychological factors experienced during lockdown in the pandemic has led to changes in individuals' eating behaviour (Coulthard et al., 2021). Managing stress with food, that is through overeating and binge-eating, can lead to regret, physical discomfort, and weight gain (Nyenhuis et al., 2020).

Some mothers (B and M) have attempted to improve their health through physical exercises with their families. B usually rides bicycle with her family every weekend, while her husband plays badminton or soccer with her sons in their front yard. M takes her children to walk with her around their neighborhood, as well as plays badminton in their front yard.

Even though T said that she rarely allocates time to exercise as she felt too tired to do her assignments afterwards, T still do a lot of physical activities. Several times a week, she goes to multiple places to fulfill her responsibility as an Islamic spiritual teacher for women (*ustadzah*). Her weekly schedule consisted of broadcasting Islamic talk for women in the local radio station, being a speaker in offline sermons for women in her village, as well as participating in local sermons.

Physical activity and exercise might be the key factors to help the individuals to better tolerate the pandemic at both the mental and physical levels (Amatriain-Fernández et al., 2020). A study found that interventions which use physical exercise have beneficial effects on frustration and boredom, which are considered common problems during the quarantine in COVID-19 pandemic (Foye et al., 2020). Similarly, individuals who exercised more frequently during the pandemic reported the most positive mood states (Brand et al., 2020).

### Setting Up New Routine

The mothers in this study have established new routine to spend time and increase bond with their children. All mothers said that they are involving their children in gardening activities, such as by watering plants or simply playing with soil. They also spend their weekend by going outdoor and enjoying nature with their children.

The mothers also built new routine to develop their children's skills. T uses the gardening activity above as an opportunity to teach her daughter about science and ecosystem. U and M stated that they like to cook together with their daughters. B said that she conducted public speaking exercises for her sons every Saturday night, together with her husband.

Some mothers also make it a routine to do things related to religion together with their children. B said that her family prays together three times a day (when her husband is already back at home) and recite the holy book (Qur'an) after evening prayer. T also prays together with her daughter at home and check her daughter's memorization of the holy book several times a week.

Since the pandemic, B and U began to involve their children in daily household chores. These include activities such as tidying up their bedrooms, washing dishes, and feeding their pets. Involving children in housework can be a strategy for parents to minimize stress in the family and reduce the burden of parenting (Goldberg et al., 2021).

Routine is an important factor in situations with a lot of uncertainties, as it can create a sense of normalcy and resilience in the family (Harrist et al., 2019). In general,

building routines effectively is also a form of positive parenting, which will increase prosocial behavior in children (Gardner et al., 2003). This new routine helps parents in dealing with a slower pace of daily activities and lower number of activities, as this allowed them to have more quality time with their families (Weaver & Swank, 2021). This, in turn, also becomes one of the benefits from the pandemic that is perceived by the parents (Fegert et al., 2020).

## Conclusion

To this date, this study is among the first ones to explore the lived parenting experience in postgraduate student mothers of kindergarten and primary school children who are learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mothers shared important insights regarding challenges, strategies, concerns, and emotional states that they experience when they were trying to adapt to multiple roles that they currently have in the pandemic. They also provided practical examples of ways in coping with the stress that comes from managing the responsibilities as a mother, educator, and student. Most mothers in this research use spiritual coping as one of the ways to cope with their anxiety and stress, reflected through praying, reciting Qur'an, listening to Islamic advice and sermons.

Mothers also voiced concerns about the consequences of the pandemic on their children, which are focused on the lack of physical activity, reduced social interactions, and increased screen time. They also came up with solutions to those problem, such as by creating agreement regarding screen time as well as setting up new routines which mainly consisted of physical activities and exercises. Besides that, the mothers also highlighted the perceived benefits of the pandemic, such as increased bonds with their children, more family time, and chance to be more involved in their children's development.

It is important to consider the lived experience of parenting in mothers, as they are usually the main caregiver and educator of their children during the pandemic. The findings from this study will help mothers in identifying and utilizing their internal and external resources to reduce the stress of a pandemic and bring out the positive outcomes from the pandemic. Furthermore, the mothers also highlight the factors that play important roles in alleviating their stress and anxiety during the pandemic. These factors, which includes spiritual coping and physical activities, should be put into consideration when designing interventions to help mothers cope with the parenting stress.

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