

## Correlation of Social Support and Mother's Self-Management of Care for a Child with A Chronic Condition

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Mothers caring for children with chronic conditions often experience physical and psychological exhaustion, which affects their ability to master the required self-management skills. Social support is needed by mothers to master self-management of childcare with chronic conditions.

**Purpose:** To analyze the relationship between social support and maternal self-management

**Methods:** This study used a quantitative descriptive method with a cross-sectional research design. Data collection used the Patient-Perceived Self-Management Tasks questionnaire and the MOS Social Support Survey Instrument by RAND. Both questionnaires had been tested for validity and reliability before being used. The population were mothers who care for children with chronic conditions. A total of 204 participants were included in this study. The sample was obtained using purposive sampling by approaching eligible mothers in pediatric inpatient wards at selected hospitals. Data analysis used the spearman correlation test.

**Results:** This study shows that the greatest social support is from a partner, with an average of 83.25, and the lowest support is support from friends, with an average score of 61.24, while the average value of maternal self-management is 61.48. The results also show a relationship between social support, namely partner support, friend support and health worker support on self-management of mothers caring for children with chronic conditions, while there is no significant relationship between health worker support and self-management of mothers caring for children with chronic conditions.

### Conclusion:

Health workers need to maximize the social support mothers receive so that mothers can master and practice adequate self-management to achieve optimal health for children with chronic conditions.

**Keywords:** chronic conditions in children, self-management, social support

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**BACKGROUND**

The prevalence of chronic conditions in children worldwide remains difficult to determine. However, data indicate that approximately 10% of children have chronic conditions (Silva et al., 2019). Around 15.7% of children have been identified as experiencing chronic illnesses (Barrio Cortes et al., 2020). Chronic conditions in children impact their growth and development process. Children with chronic conditions face more physical and psychosocial challenges due to various symptoms and effects of chronic illness, such as stress, treatment demands, hospitalization periods, and uncertainty about the future (van der Laan et al., 2023).

In addition to affecting children, chronic conditions also have an impact on parents, particularly mothers. Learning about their child's diagnosis and treatment often leads to physical, psychological, social, and economic stress for parents (van der Laan et al., 2023). Besides anxiety and depression, some parents also experience burnout syndrome (Pop-Jordanova, 2023). Nevertheless, parents play a crucial role in supporting their child's treatment, including fulfilling basic needs and providing direct care. Therefore, adequate self-management is necessary to ensure mothers can care for their children effectively despite various challenges and difficulties.

Self-management in parents caring for children with chronic conditions reflects their active involvement in understanding the disease, recognizing symptoms, and acquiring caregiving skills (Olij et al., 2021), as well as making decisions or seeking help to prevent potential complications in children (Bravo et al., 2020). Parents caring for children with chronic diseases face various challenges such as psychological stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, economic burden, time constraints, and lack of social support and adequate access to health services. In addition, limited health literacy often hinders understanding and adherence to children's medical care. These issues negatively impact their ability to manage their children's care, while research on self-management and parental mental health is still very limited, especially in developing countries. (Bailey et al., 2013; Cousino & Hazen, 2013; Dunst, 2022). Adequate self-management can be supported by providing social support to mothers. Appropriate social support helps mothers monitor their child's care and condition, leading to changes in the child's cognitive, behavioral, and emotional well-being (Qudsi & Rizkillah, 2023). Social support for mothers is a key factor influencing the psychological and physical health of mothers or caregivers of children with chronic conditions (Cousino & Hazen, 2013; Moriwaki et al., 2022). The condition of children with chronic illnesses can increase the burden on caregivers, particularly mothers (Pop-Jordanova, 2023).. Therefore, social support from spouses, family, friends, and healthcare providers is essential in alleviating the burden of mothers caring for children with chronic conditions. Social support can help mothers adapt to their child's condition, provide proper care, recognize symptoms of the illness, and make informed decisions regarding treatment and their child's well-being (Bravo et al., 2020). Currently, there is limited research on social support and self-management in mothers caring for children with chronic conditions.

**OBJECTIVE**

This study analyses the relationship between social support and self-management in mothers caring for children with chronic conditions. The types of social support examined in this study include support from spouses, family, friends, and healthcare providers.

## **METHODS**

### **Study Design**

This study is quantitative research with a cross-sectional design. The research was conducted at Hospital in Malang City, East Java. The independent variable in this study is social support, which consists of support from spouses, family, friends, and healthcare providers. Meanwhile, the dependent variable is the mother's self-management. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee of RSUD Dr. Saiful Anwar Malang, with registration number: 400/207/K.3/102.7/2024.

### **Population and Sample**

The study population consists of all mothers who care for children with chronic conditions at one of hospital in Malang City, East Java. The study obtained a total sample of 204 mothers, using purposive sampling. Respondents were chosen based on the inclusion criteria of mothers caring for children with chronic conditions aged 2–12 years who had been undergoing treatment for at least three days, had both parents present, and whose children were in a stable condition. The exclusion criteria included mothers with children admitted to the intensive care unit.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Data was collected through interviews with mothers caring for children with chronic conditions, using a structured questionnaire. After receiving a detailed explanation of the research, all respondents who agreed to participate signed an informed consent form.

### **Research Instruments**

The self-management variable was measured using the Patient-Perceived Self-Management Tasks questionnaire, which consists of 18 questions. The social support variable was measured using the MOS Social Support Survey Instrument by RAND, which consists of 19 questions. The validity test of the questionnaire on support, and self-management used the Pearson product-moment test, while the reliability test used Cronbach's Alpha. Validity and reliability tests were conducted on 30 samples that had the same criteria as the research sample. The validity test of the questionnaire obtained an  $r$  value of spouse support of 0.624 to 0.902, family support of 0.607 to 0.860, friend support of 0.787 to 0.955, health worker support of 0.549 to 0.837 and self-management of 0.504 to 0.841. The calculated  $r$  value is greater than the  $r$  table value (30 samples) which is 0.361 so it is declared valid. The reliability test on the spouse support of 0.766, family support of 0.764, friend support of 0.772, health worker support of 0.760 and self-management of 0.929. All reliability values are above 0.6 so they are declared reliable. Data was collected at Hospital, from August to December 2024.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

Univariate analysis examined demographic data, social support, and mothers' self-management. Data were presented using mean, median, minimum-maximum values, and standard deviation. Bivariate analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between social support and maternal self-management using the Spearman correlation test, because the scale of the data variables was interval but the data was not normal.

## **RESULTS**

Table 1 below presents the characteristics of respondents, specifically mothers who care for children with chronic conditions at Dr. Saiful Anwar Hospital.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

| Variable                        | Category                                | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------|---|-----------|----------------|
| <b>Mother's Characteristics</b> |   |           |                |
| Experience in caregiving        | Never                                   | 190       | 93.1           |
|                                 | Ever                                    | 14        | 6.9            |
| Mother's age                    | 17 - 25 years old                       | 10        | 4.9            |
|                                 | 26 - 35 years old                       | 93        | 45.6           |
|                                 | 36 - 45 years old                       | 83        | 40.7           |
|                                 | 46 - 55 years old                       | 18        | 8.8            |
|                                 | Primary                                 | 69        | 33.8           |
| Education                       | Secondary                               | 81        | 39.7           |
|                                 | Tertiary                                | 54        | 26.5           |
|                                 | Primary                                 | 69        | 33.8           |
| Job                             | Secondary                               | 81        | 39.7           |
|                                 | Tertiary                                | 54        | 26.5           |
|                                 | 1 child                                 | 39        | 19.1           |
| Number of Children              | 2 children                              | 127       | 62.3           |
|                                 | ≥ 3 children                            | 38        | 18.6           |
| <b>Child's Characteristic</b>   |   |           |                |
| Child's Age                     | 2 - 4 years old                         | 60        | 29.4           |
|                                 | 5 - 7 years old                         | 50        | 24.5           |
|                                 | 8 - 12 years old                        | 94        | 46.1           |
| Gender                          | Male                                    | 115       | 56.4           |
|                                 | Female                                  | 89        | 43.6           |
| Duration of Treatment           | < 1 year                                | 102       | 50.0           |
|                                 | > 1 year                                | 102       | 50.0           |
| <b>Environment</b>              |   |           |                |
| Place of Residence              | Urban                                   | 62        | 30.4           |
|                                 | Rural                                   | 142       | 69.6           |
| Family Income                   | Low (< Rp. 3.000.000)                   | 116       | 56.9           |
|                                 | Medium (± Rp. 3.000.000 – Rp 6.000.000) | 73        | 35.8           |
|                                 | High (> Rp 6.000.000)                   | 15        | 7.4            |
|                                 |   |           |                |

Based on Table 1, most respondents had no prior experience in caregiving, were aged between 26 and 35, had a secondary education, and were mainly homemakers, laborers, or unemployed. Most respondents had two children. Regarding children's characteristics, the majority were male, aged 8 - 12, and had undergone treatment for either less than or more than a year in equal proportions. From an environmental perspective, most respondents lived in rural areas and had a low household income (< Rp 3,000,000). Table 2 below presents the results regarding social support and self-management among mothers caring for children with chronic conditions at Dr. Saiful Anwar Hospital.

**Table 2.** Overview of Social Support and Self-management of Mothers Caring for Children with Chronic Conditions

| Variable           | N   | Mean  | Standard Deviation | Minimum Value | Maximum Value |
|--------------------|-----|-------|--------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Spousal Support    | 204 | 83.26 | 15.00              | 19.00         | 95.00         |
| Family Support     | 204 | 78.52 | 16.05              | 19.00         | 95.00         |
| Friend Support     | 204 | 61.24 | 18.52              | 19.00         | 95.00         |
| Healthcare Support | 204 | 78.36 | 14.72              | 19.00         | 95.00         |
| Self-Management    | 204 | 61.48 | 7.96               | 42.00         | 72.00         |

Based on Table 2, most mothers received the highest level of support from their spouses, with an average score of 83.26, while the lowest support came from friends, with an average score of 61.24. Descriptive analysis also revealed that the average self-management score among mothers caring for children with chronic conditions was 61.48, with a standard deviation 7.96. This average score indicates that most respondents had a moderate level of self-management. However, the wide range of scores, from 42 to 72, suggests significant variation in self-management abilities among respondents. This variation may be influenced by educational level, caregiving experience (Bravo et al., 2020a), and access to information resources and social support (Pop-Jordanova, 2023). The relatively small standard deviation indicates that most respondents' self-management levels did not deviate significantly from the average.

**Table 3.** Relationship Between Social Support and Self-Management of Mothers Caring for Children with Chronic Conditions

|                    | <i>Self-Management</i>  |                |
|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
|                    | Correlation Coefficient | <i>P Value</i> |
| Spousal Support    | 0.418                   | 0.000          |
| Family Support     | 0.197                   | 0.005          |
| Friend Support     | 0.201                   | 0.004          |
| Healthcare Support | 0.293                   | 0.000          |

Table 3 presents the relationship between social support and self-management among mothers caring for children with chronic conditions. Based on the analysis results, all types of social support whether from partners, family, friends, or health workers have a positive relationship with self-management ability. Partner support shows moderate relationship strength ( $r = 0.418$ ), while family support ( $r = 0.197$ ) and friends ( $r = 0.201$ ) have weak relationship strength, and health worker support has weak to moderate relationship strength ( $r = 0.293$ ). All of these positive correlation coefficients indicate that the higher the support an individual receives, the better their self-management ability.

**DISCUSSION****Spousal Support and Self-Management of Mothers Caring for Children with Chronic Conditions**

Support from a spouse has been shown to enhance the self-management abilities of mothers caring for children with chronic illnesses. Spouses who provide strong support and positive emotional feedback help mothers manage stress and maintain emotional stability, enabling them to handle difficult situations effectively (Yang et al., 2022). Previous research found that effective spousal involvement significantly improves mothers' psychological adaptation in creating a supportive environment during challenging times (Porter et al., 2019). Strong spousal support enhances mothers' perception of their ability to cope with stressors related to their child's illness, particularly in caregiving and treatment, which are essential aspects of self-management.

A previous study stated that mothers caring for children with chronic conditions face a high caregiving burden. When mothers receive increased support from their spouses, their caregiving burden is reduced, allowing for improved self-management as they can focus more on their child's needs rather than feeling overwhelmed by stress. This aligns with the findings of this study, where the majority of mothers caring for children with chronic conditions at hospital, reported receiving high levels of spousal support (Kim et al., 2024). The research also found that mothers who receive strong support from their spouses tend to perceive their child's health and caregiving abilities more positively (Kim et al., 2024). This positive outlook contributes to more effective self-management strategies, as mothers feel more confident handling their responsibilities. Another previous research state that spousal support influences mothers' caregiving abilities. The study found that an actively involved spouse assisting in caregiving tasks, such as medication administration, hygiene maintenance, and accompanying the child to medical consultations, helped reduce the mother's burden, enhancing her self-management capabilities (Felizardo et al., 2022). Emotional and practical support from spouses strengthens mothers' self-management abilities, improving their well-being and contributing to more effective childcare (Weiß et al., 2024).

**Family Support and Self-Management of Mothers Caring for Children with Chronic Conditions**

Family support other than from a partner, such as from parents, siblings or extended family members, plays an important role in strengthening mothers' self-management abilities in caring for children with chronic conditions. Based on the results of this study, mothers who receive support from their closest family show better abilities in their self-management such as being able to organize their child's medication schedule, manage their child's physical and emotional care, interact with health workers, make health decisions and carry out preventive and curative actions at home. This is in line with previous research showing that the contribution of extended family such as grandmothers and siblings who often step in to help with caregiving tasks, allows mothers to manage their time better and reduce the burden of care so that mothers are able to manage their responsibilities more effectively (Bukini et al., 2022).

Emotional support from extended family members for mothers such as providing encouragement and a sense of security helps reduce stress and anxiety associated with managing children's chronic diseases. The presence of family members can create a more supportive environment so that it is possible to minimize feelings of isolation in childcare by mothers (Lappalainen et al., 2021). Another study confirmed that a supportive family environment strengthens maternal coping and increases maternal self-efficacy, for example, wealth and educational attainment of extended family members are associated with increased



access to more adequate health services. When relatives are knowledgeable and involved, they are able to assist mothers in making informed decisions about health care options (Treleaven, 2023). Thus, family support contributes directly to nursing care of important aspects of maternal self-management, such as symptom monitoring, management of care and treatment, emotional regulation and decision making.

### **Friend Support and Self-Management of Mothers Caring for Children with Chronic Conditions**

The result of this study is a significant relationship between friend support and the self-management of mothers caring for children with chronic conditions. Peer support plays an essential role in enhancing the self-management abilities of mothers caring for children with chronic illnesses. The presence of friends who provide both emotional and practical support helps mothers manage stress and reduce feelings of isolation. Additionally, friends can offer valuable insights and share experiences related to caring for children with chronic illnesses. This exchange of information empowers mothers, enabling them to improve their self-management and caregiving skills. Learning from friends who have faced similar challenges in caring for children with chronic conditions can boost mothers' confidence in supporting their children through treatment challenges (Kurniawan et al., 2022).

Previous research) on parents caring for children with autism and ADHD, found that peer social support acts as a protective factor against the negative impact of stress on mothers caring for children with autism or ADHD (Lovell et al., 2012). Reduced psychological stress allows mothers to focus more on managing their children's and their needs, which is a crucial part of self-management. When mothers feel supported and not alone, they tend to be more optimistic in making decisions that benefit their child's care. A study by Ngo et al. (2023) found that practical assistance from friends, such as childcare or meal preparation, helps alleviate mothers' burdens, allowing them to focus more on their children's healthcare needs. Some mothers in the study mentioned that having friends willing to listen to their concerns about their child's condition provided emotional relief (Ngo et al., 2023). Adequate social support has been shown to reduce parenting stress in mothers of children with special needs, enabling them to provide optimal care. Peer support programs for mothers caring for children with chronic conditions have been shown to significantly improve caregivers' well-being. Previous research found that peer support programs, including experience-sharing, support groups, regular meetings, and resource-sharing on healthcare services and treatments, help foster connections among mothers. Providing a structured environment for effective experience-sharing enhances the self-management abilities of mothers caring for children with chronic conditions (Lancaster et al., 2023).

### **Healthcare Support and Self-Management of Mothers Caring for Children with Chronic Conditions at RSUD Dr. Saiful Anwar Malang**

The findings of this study indicate a significant relationship between healthcare support and the self-management of mothers caring for children with chronic conditions. Healthcare professionals can provide social support for mothers caring for children with chronic conditions during medical treatments or routine check-ups. As trained professionals with expertise in healthcare, medical personnel play a crucial role in supporting mothers in managing their children's chronic conditions. Healthcare support includes providing information or advice, practical assistance, and the benefits derived from the presence of healthcare professionals. This support helps mothers enhance their self-management skills and caregiving abilities. Motivation and education about their child's illness enable mothers to adapt and adjust, improving their self-management (Duncan et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2019).

Previous research on healthcare support for mothers caring for children with chronic conditions highlights the necessity of healthcare support in reducing stress and overcoming the challenges mothers face in managing their children's healthcare needs (Rafferty et al., 2022). The study also found that when mothers receive adequate support from healthcare professionals, it positively impacts their child's health. Additionally, healthcare support enhances mothers' self-management abilities, decision-making skills, and involvement in their child's healthcare management. Another study emphasized the role of healthcare professionals in empowering parents, particularly mothers, who care for children with chronic conditions (Svavarsdottir et al., 2020). Healthcare professionals serve as essential resources for families, helping them understand and prevent complications associated with chronic illnesses. Strong healthcare support has also been shown to reduce parental stress, improve self-management abilities, and enable mothers to provide better care for their children (Bravo et al., 2020).

These findings underscore the importance of healthcare professionals in providing continuous education and support to mothers. Enhancing healthcare providers' communication skills, particularly in empowering mothers, can improve the support mothers receive. Public health policies should also consider developing community-based support groups for mothers, where peer-sharing can provide significant emotional support (Kurniawan et al., 2022; Lancaster et al., 2023). Implementing technology-based interventions, such as digital applications for self-monitoring and education, could also be an innovative solution to strengthen self-management among mothers, especially in areas with limited access to healthcare professionals (Ngo et al., 2023; Weiß et al., 2024).

## CONCLUSION

Based on this study's findings, it can be concluded that spousal support, friend support, and healthcare support are significantly associated with the self-management of mothers caring for children with chronic conditions. However, family support did not significantly affect mothers' self-management. Support from various sources is crucial in optimizing mothers' self-management abilities in caring for their children. Healthcare professionals must implement interventions to ensure that mothers receive appropriate support and that their social environment provides adequate assistance.

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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

This research has no conflict of interest.

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