

## Literature Review

# Experiencing Loneliness in Motherhood

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### Abstracts

Received: April 2, 2024  
Accepted: July 15, 2024  
Published Online: December 2, 2024

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**Introduction:** Motherhood is a lifelong learning process. Becoming a mother involves huge changes and a major shift in identity. We usually don't pair loneliness with motherhood, but researchers have found that motherhood could be filled with lonely feelings. A study by the British Red Cross found that more than 83% of mothers under 30 years old feel lonely at some time. Even before COVID, one study found that more than 90 percent of moms reported feeling lonely after having kids, over one-third said they cried regularly, and more than half suffered from anxiety. This study aims to determine the problems with loneliness in motherhood and how they influence the whole family's long-term growth and wellness. **Methods:** PubMed and Google Scholar were searched using the following keyword: (loneliness) AND (motherhood) AND (mental health) AND (maternal) using the journal publication filter for the 2018-2023 issue. **Review:** Loneliness isn't only a concern for mothers but also for all family members. Mothers who experience a high degree of loneliness are likely to be depressed, which in turn leads to decreased self-esteem and poor health, and consequently the poor health of their children. Stronger involvement of the mother's family, friends, and other support systems should be promoted. **Conclusions:** Researchers should pay attention to the facts that building close connections with others can stop social isolation in mothers from taking a toll on their mental health

**Keywords:** Loneliness, Motherhood, Mental Health, Maternal

**Cite this as:** Bestari. D., and Cherian. A. V. "Experiencing Loneliness in Motherhood". Jurnal Psikiatri Surabaya, vol. 13, no. S11, pp.68-72, 2024. doi: [10.20473/jps.v13.isi1.62658](https://doi.org/10.20473/jps.v13.isi1.62658)

## INTRODUCTION

According to a survey, more than 85% of 2,000 mothers feel lonely since having children.

Furthermore, another study revealed that 1 in 7 women experience postpartum depression during the year after giving birth [1]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 1 in 3 new mothers who had babies in the first months of the pandemic experienced postpartum depression— while 1 in 5 had major depressive symptoms, according to research led by the University of Michigan School of Nursing and Michigan Medicine [2]. Although depression is a mental health disorder and loneliness is a temporary emotional state, feelings of loneliness can lead to the development of depression and other mental disorders [3]. Paternal and maternal relationships similarly affect the risk of depression in children and adolescents [4].

There is also a study that stated motherhood loneliness has intergenerational impacts on parents' and children's mental health [5]. Untreated postpartum mood and anxiety disorders place women and their families at risk for negative biopsychosocial sequelae [6]. A study found that children's emotional problems by the age of 7 years old were positively associated with maternal mental health problems when the child was 11 years old. Reciprocally, maternal mental health problems when the child was 11 years old were positively associated with the child's emotional problems at age 14 years old [4, 6]. Establishing what is known about loneliness and which mothers are at an increased risk of experiencing loneliness is significant to further intervention and support [1].

## REVIEWS

The presence of babies at home is an addition to the crowd at home. Behind the sound of a child's laughter and crying, a mother often feels lonely. The moment of being a mother does involve very complicated feelings. Usually, feelings of loneliness turn into feelings of isolation. The presence of a child

often isolates a mother [7]. This feeling of isolation is not solely because there is no one around. It is common for a mother to feel lonely or have limited access to the outside world after giving birth, especially during the pandemic. This makes them feel lonely and vulnerable to stress. Some factors that may contribute to why a mother feels lonely and isolated are [8].

### 1. Physical Recovery After Birth

A mother needs time to recover after giving birth, which generally takes six to eight weeks. However, many other women feel that they have not recovered in such a short period. During this recovery period, women may experience back pain, perineal and pelvic pain, enlarged eye bags due to lack of sleep, swollen breasts, etc. In these times, mothers tend not to have the energy to spend time socializing with relatives or friends [1, 8].

### 2. Breastfeeding

Breast milk provides the ideal nutrition for infants, but it takes so much effort and sometimes isolates women. Especially in the early stages of childbirth, many women think they don't have time to do anything other than breastfeed [9].

### 3. Adjusting to Maternity Leave

In Indonesia, regulations on maternity leave are generally given to women for three months. Many people view maternity leave as a vacation, in contrast, maternity leave is hard work. Once a mother doesn't work outside, they'll miss the regular socializing time. This certainly makes women vulnerable to feeling lonely and isolated. Women who decide to become stay-at-home moms report loneliness as one of the most difficult aspects of being a mother. Some stay-at-home moms even finally decide to return to work, at least part-time, or run a business to overcome isolation [10, 11].

### 4. Routine Changes

Shortly after giving birth, the routine certainly changes. A mother no longer can visit her favourite coffee shop every day and chat with other visitors. When all of this routine

and interaction just disappears for a while, women can feel very lonely [11, 12].

#### 5. Reduced Couple Time

Quality time with a partner decreases after having children. Conversations about how the day went, what problems were encountered, and personal goals for the future were difficult things to talk about. This is what makes a mother alienated and isolated even if her husband is by her side [13, 14, 15].

#### 6. The Myth of the Perfect Mother

Feeling lonely can also stem from unrealistic demands that to be a good mother, a woman must always be by her child's side. The myth of the perfect mother has been a symbol to embody and a role model to follow by a lot of women who are devoted to the standards of self-sacrifice, unshakable maternal love to their children, and domesticity. The good mother, the epitome of the nineteenth-century ideals of femininity and motherhood in Western society, has been valued and celebrated not only by mothers themselves but also by theorists and critics. Yet, women who do not adhere to the image of the domestic, economically dependent, and unconditionally and unambivalently loving mother are supposed to. However, a mother needs to leave it for a while just for shopping, seeing a doctor, or even me time. Often a mother is tormented and lonely because she can't go anywhere because of this myth. In fact, what is needed to be a good mother is a secure attachment bond between her and her child [16, 17, 18].

How to cope with loneliness in motherhood  
Several things that help coping with loneliness after becoming a mother are:

- Leave the house at least once a day, even if it's only for a walk

Even if it's only mothers and the kids, being in nature can be relaxing to the mind. A reset is made through the outdoors.

- Join mother support groups

When mothers do this, not only they are overcoming their feelings of loneliness but helping the other mom as well.

- Ask for help from partner, friends, and family

One way to cope with loneliness is to call supportive people despite the discomfort of doing so. If the idea that asking for help is a sign of weakness, look at it as a form of taking care of family, as a sign of strength and for the benefit of all. It also teaching children the valuable lesson that we all need help sometimes and it's okay to ask for it.

- Do something for yourself that doesn't involve the baby

Everyone needs a personal space for wellbeing, happiness and mental health. Previous research has shown that ignoring these needs can have a negative impact on not only the mother's health but also on the health of the family. Self-care is essential for mothers so they can take care their babies better [19, 20, 21].

## CONCLUSION

Becoming a mother is one of the most transformative phase a woman can experience. Parenting involves a number of mental health costs, including time, energy, conflicts with other social roles, and the financial burden of childrearing. These hardships are especially significant for women, who are often the primary caretakers of children. Accepting the lonely feeling and asking for help doesn't make a woman a bad mother or a sign of weakness. In fact, it helps creating a better mother because by helping herself, she is also helping her child. Stronger involvement of family, friends and support system in child-rearing should be promoted.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Not declared

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I do not have any conflict of interest, personal or organizational, real, apparent or potential, in participating in this literature review.

## FUNDING

None

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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