

EARLY CHILDHOOD PARENTING: THE ROLE OF PARENTAL MINDFULNESS AND COPARENTING COMPETENCE IN PARENTAL WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

Parents' well-being are significant things. Well-being is not only counted for parents' physical, emotional, and mental conditions as an individual, it also has enormous influences on various aspects of children's development. Parents tend to face challenges, difficulties, and pressures during parenting, especially when caring for children in early childhood. This study aims to determine the role of parental mindfulness and coparenting competence in predicting parental well-being. Three hundred and thirty-one parents of children in early childhood participated in this study. The researchers used the convenience sampling method. Parents completed the Parental Well-Being Scale, Bangor Mindful Parenting Scale, and Coparenting Competence Scale. The result of multiple linear regression analysis indicated that parental mindfulness and coparenting competence have significant roles in predicting parental well-being. The coefficient of determination showed that parental mindfulness and coparenting competence simultaneously explained 15.7% of the parental well-being variance. There are no significant differences in parental well-being between fathers and mothers. This finding indicates the importance of parenting competence in order to improve parental well-being.

Keywords: parental mindfulness; coparenting competence; parental well-being; early childhood

EARLY CHILDHOOD PARENTING: PERAN PARENTAL MINDFULNESS DAN COPARENTING COMPETENCE DALAM KESEJAHTERAAN ORANG TUA

ABSTRAK

Kesejahteraan orang tua adalah hal yang penting. Kesejahteraan tidak hanya berdampak pada kondisi fisik, emosional, dan mental orang tua sebagai individu, namun juga memiliki pengaruh besar pada berbagai aspek perkembangan anak. Orang tua cenderung menghadapi tantangan, kesulitan, dan tekanan selama mengasuh anak, terutama ketika merawat anak di masa early childhood. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui peran parental mindfulness dan coparenting competence dalam memprediksi kesejahteraan orang tua. Tiga ratus tiga puluh satu orang tua dari anak di masa early childhood berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini. Peneliti menggunakan metode convenience sampling. Orang tua menyelesaikan Parental Well-Being Scale, Bangor Mindful Parenting Scale, dan Coparenting Competence Scale. Hasil analisis regresi linear berganda menunjukkan bahwa parental mindfulness dan coparenting competence berperan penting dalam memprediksi kesejahteraan orang tua. Koefisien determinasi menunjukkan bahwa parental mindfulness dan coparenting competence secara bersamaan memiliki kontribusi sebesar 15,7% ke varians kesejahteraan orang tua. Tidak terdapat perbedaan kesejahteraan orang tua yang signifikan di antara ayah dan ibu. Temuan ini menunjukkan pentingnya coparenting competence dalam rangka meningkatkan kesejahteraan orang tua.

Kata kunci: parental mindfulness; coparenting competence; kesejahteraan orang tua; early childhood

INTRODUCTION

Childbearing and parenthood contribute to the parents' psychological condition, specifically their well-being. The results of previous studies indicate that the presence of children in parents' lives create complex and overlapping feelings (both positive and negative side) (Negraia & Augustine, 2020). Parents reported higher well-being because parenting is considered a valuable and rewarding experience. They find meaning and purpose in life (Nelson et al., 2014), gain a sense of affection (Nomaguchi, 2012), make themselves feel worthy (Novoa et al., 2021) and feel proud to live up to social expectations (Nelson et al., 2014). On the other hand, parenting is also followed by psychological costs due to increase in difficulties and responsibilities as they have to ensure optimal development in children. They have to provide good education, financial support, encouragement, affection, and protection (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2017). In order to fulfill the children's needs, parents often encountered various conflicts, for instance with spouses and workers (Craig, 2007), as well as being challenged with other difficult choices. They have to spend most of their time in routine cycles related to household and work tasks, and also tend to lack leisure time for themselves (Suldo & Fefer, 2013; Augustine et al., 2017). The demands and responsibilities of parenting lead to negative emotions and less well-being (Pollmann-Schult, 2014). In other words, being a parent can lead parents' well-being in two different directions, simultaneously increasing and decreasing it both.

Furthermore, parents' well-being will also vary according to the children's developmental stages, as demands and rewards change in accordance to the children's age (Meier et al., 2018). For instance, the period that has many challenges and demands for parents is early childhood. This period is known for its rapid and continuous growth in various areas, such as cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional (Lang, 2020). The focus of parenting in early childhood is not only on life-sustaining care but also on preparing children to take part in broader social life (such as school and peer context) and ensuring children has opportunities to do exploration, while at the same time parents need to set clear and consistent boundaries to discipline children (Walker & Berthelsen, 2010). Parenting in early childhood is related to frustration in both children and parents, especially in terms of routines and disciplines (Brooks, 2013). At this period, children's initiative to try things increased and if they fail to fulfill it, they tend to express their frustration with challenging behavior. In addition, children in early childhood still have difficulty understanding other people's points of view, in this way child-parent conflicts tend to occur during disagreements (Santrock, 2013). Parents have to help children's emotional regulation and consistently respond to children with a great emotional effort to support them. Therefore, parenting in the early childhood period requires intensive time, attention, and effort (both physically and emotionally) that may limit self-care and leisure, which often makes parents feel excessively tired and lowers their well-being (Craig & Mullan, 2013).

Parental well-being is the state of parents who are emotionally stable and feel positive emotions. The parents who experience well-being are satisfied with their role as parents and feel supported by others (Diener et al., 2009; McConkey, 2020). Parental well-being is important because it affects the parents personally, the children, the whole family system, and even the wider social system (Lauinger, 2015; MacKenzie, 2011). Low parental well-being also causes family dysfunction due to worsening interactions between family members, increasing potential for conflict, and causing adverse effects on children's development (Williams & Cheadle, 2016). As explained in previous studies, higher levels of parental well-being was found to be successful in facilitating the process of parenting practices (Leung & Slep, 2006), as well as increasing the well-being of children (Clair, 2012). On the other hand, poor parental well-being was associated with the high risk of behavioral problems in children (Karaszia & Wildman, 2009).

The importance of parental well-being has been the subject of parenting studies in recent years, where experts have explained the well-being of parents and how to measure it (Lauinger, 2015). In addition, previous studies reported that parental well-being is influenced by marital status (divorced or not), children's health conditions (Shenaar-Golan, 2016), type of work and parent-child interactions (Coser, 2013). It was also influenced by socioeconomic status, gender, and tensions experienced by racial/ethnic minorities (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). Negraia and Augustine (2020) also added that parenting activities, such as housework or leisure, as well as the presence of children, affect the well-being of parents. Most of those previous parental well-being studies have focused only on the external factors. This indicates a need to understand the various internal factors of parents

themselves to their parental well-being. The present study assesses the significance of parenting competences to predict parents' well-being.

Coparenting is one of the parenting competences related to well-being. This competency refers to the way both parents coordinate, communicate, support each other, manage conflict, and form collaborative relationships that are relevant to raising children (Atherton, 2017). Parents who can apply coparenting in their parenting practices will find agreement in their child-rearing methods and carry out parenting roles together and in coordination (Kang et al., 2020). Coparenting competence can reduce misunderstandings, conflicts, and tensions that may occur during parenting. When the parents experience difficulties and challenges, they can feel mutual responsibility that they are not alone in facing the difficulties. As a result, they can focus on finding solutions instead of struggling with anxiety and unpleasant feelings.

Coparenting competence focuses not only on building relationships between parents, but also on complex triadic relationships, in which father, mother, and child are seen as a system that works together (McHale et al., 2004). Positive interaction between family members is essential to the family's well-being, including parents (Yu & Xiao, 2021). It allows children to have close relationships with both sides of the parents. When mothers and fathers support and encourage each other, they will become more sensitive and responsive to children's needs. Previous studies of parental well-being have only dealt with dyadic relationships between spouses (Umberson et al., 2013), and much less is known about the impact of parents' ability to maintain triadic relationships. Therefore, this study discusses the importance of coparenting competence to parental well-being.

Another parenting competence that is also related to parental well-being is mindfulness. Mindfulness means having full attention to the present moment or being aware of the behavior, feelings, and circumstances that happened around us (Shapiro et al., 2007). By focusing their full attention, people will be more sensitive to different contexts and have a broader perspective (Ngnoumen & Langer, 2016). Furthermore, mindfulness facilitates information processing to be more effective, especially in interpreting and reorganizing situations that are considered unpleasant or stressful (Fiocco & Mallya, 2014). Therefore, even though parents are in difficult circumstances, they can still control the situation and not get caught up in it

In the context of parenting, parental mindfulness makes parents more sensitive to children's conditions. Mindful parenting means it focuses on parents' awareness in the present moment. They pay attention to the feelings and behavior of themselves and their children, accept children warmly and lovingly, do not judge themselves or their children, have emotional awareness, and control their thought and behavior according to parenting goals (Duncan et al., 2009). This parenting competence require interpersonal processes that involve parent interaction with children (Townshend, 2016). Mindful parenting allows them to establish good relationships with children and direct their attention to things that can support more adaptive parenting. The results of previous studies have shown that parental mindfulness is associated with a lower risk of stress (Haydicky et al., 2015), depression, and anxiety (Moreira & Canavarro, 2018). On the other hand, less mindful parents tend to have negative emotions (Beer et al., 2013); anxiety symptoms (Corthorn & Milicic, 2016); unaffectionate and unresponsive parenting practice (Radesky et al., 2016). Thus, conflicts will arise more often and the interaction becomes uncomfortable for both children and parents. Previous research on parental well-being has been mostly restricted to mindfulness-based interventions in treatment or clinical setting (Cachia et al., 2015; Rinaldi & Retnowati, 2016; Rahmawati et al., 2019; Fuller & Fitter, 2020). There is much less information about effects of parental mindfulness to well-being in non-clinical settings, specifically in families with children in early childhood. Therefore, research about mindfulness in non-clinical family settings is still very much needed. The objective of this study was to simultaneously investigate the effect of co-parenting competence and parental mindfulness on parenting well-being in the context of early childhood parenting.

METHOD

This research used quantitative research methods. The dependent variable of this study was parental well-being. The independent variables were co-parenting competence and parental mindfulness. Participants were obtained online through various social media and online groups, and offline by recruiting directly in 20 preschools (PAUD) in Padang city. The sampling technique was convenience sampling. The characteristics of the sample

were fathers and mothers who have children between 3-6 years old, and also live with their children and spouse. Parents who had more than one child in the target age range were asked to focus on one child alone. All participants reported that their children did not have any developmental disorders. All participants have obtained research information and an informed consent sheet before participating in this study. A total of 331 preschoolers' parents, consisting of 172 fathers ($M_{age} = 37$ years old) and 159 mothers ($M_{age} = 35$ years old), participated in this study, and the average age of their children is five years four months. Forty-eight participants filled out online questionnaires via google forms and 285 participants filled the questionnaire directly (offline) with paper-pencil. Table 1 presents the participants' level of education

Table 1. Participant's level of education

Level of Education	<i>N</i>	(%)
High school	118	35.6
Diploma	43	13
Bachelor degree	136	41.1
Master degree	34	10.3
Total	331	100

The Parental Well-Being Scale is used to assess parents' well-being. Parental Well-Being Scale adapted from McConkey (2020) ($\alpha = 0.908$). Eight items were expressed as opposites in two columns, separated by ten boxes from 1 to 10. Parents were asked to choose a number that best represented their condition during parenting practices. Examples of the opposite items are "I find it difficult to look after my child" and "I enjoy looking after my child".

The parents' ability to act together while raising children was measured using the Coparenting Competence scale. The Coparenting Competence Scale was adapted from Atherton et al. (2017). This scale consists of 10 favorable and unfavorable statements ($\alpha = 0.745$), with the answer choices ranging from 0 (not at all appropriate) to 4 (very appropriate). Six items were regarding triadic parenting, item example is "My partner and I are adapting well together to meet our child/n's changing needs") and four items were about parenting without their partner's involvement (reversed score), "My partner makes parenting harder than it needs to be".

Furthermore, parents' competence to be fully aware of the moments with their children when carrying out parenting practices was measured with Bangor Mindful Parenting Scale. The Bangor Mindful Parenting Scale was adapted from Jones et al. (2014). This scale consists of 15 favorable and unfavorable statements ($\alpha = 0.658$). The parents rated their responses on 4 points Likert scale: true (0), rarely (1), often (2), and always (3). These items refer to the five mindfulness domains in the context of parenting, such as acting with awareness "I rush through activities with my child without being really attentive to him/her", non-reactivity "In difficult situations with my child I can pause without reacting straight away", non-judgement "I tend to make judgments about whether I am being a good or a bad parent", observing "I pay attention to how my emotions affect the way I act towards my child" and describing "I have trouble thinking of the right words to express how I feel about my child".

All of the instruments have been adapted into Indonesian and the process was consistent with the ITC Guidelines on Adapting Tests, such as backward translation and using a qualified translator which represents balanced expertise of language, psychological concept, and culture (Sireci et al., 2006). Also, all items were considered valid and reliable, with the corrected item-total value for each item above 0.200 and the value of Cronbach alpha is greater than 0.6 (Ursachi et al., 2015). The research data were analyzed using SPSS 24 by performing multiple linear regression tests. Classical assumptions were also tested, such as normality test, multicollinearity test, and heteroscedasticity (Field, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Means and standard deviations were calculated for parenting competences and well-being. Overall, parents had a high level of parental well-being ($M = 65$, $SD = 13.1$) and coparenting competence ($SD = 4.3$; and

$M = 32$), and also moderate level of parental mindfulness ($M = 32, SD = 4.4$). An independent sample of t-test was also conducted to investigate the difference in parental well-being based on the parents' gender (father and mother). The tests found no significant differences between the average scores of parental well-being ($t = .293; p > 0.05$). Previous research has shown that there are differences in parenting demands and stressors of mothers and fathers, that negative affect is more commonly felt by mothers than fathers when carrying out parenting tasks (Musick et al., 2016). These differences relate to the time devoted to parenting, as mothers are more expected to always be there for their children and complete many domestic tasks while fathers are more expected to participate in more enjoyable activities, such as playing with children (Negraia et al., 2018). However, it does not mean that the mother's well-being will be inferior to the father's. As found in this study, there was no significant gender difference related to parental wellbeing. This can be explained by the process of interpreting and giving meaning, even though parenting is a great challenge, it is considered relevant and meaningful (Ben-Ari, 2012). Mothers do experience complex challenges in their daily child care, but at the same time they get opportunities for optimal growth and achieving goals.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the interrelationships between variables. The results showed a significant positive relationship between coparenting competence and parental well-being ($r = .35, p < .001$) which indicated that the more capable the parents were in cooperating and maintaining triadic relationships, the higher the well-being. A positive correlation was also found between parental mindfulness and parental well-being ($r = .51, p < .001$), indicating that when parents are paying more attention to every parenting moment, they will experience greater well-being.

Classical assumption test is a prerequisite for multiple regression analysis so that the estimation of parameters and regression coefficients is not biased. The classical assumption tests that have been carried out are the normality test, multicollinearity test, autocorrelation test, and heteroscedasticity test. The normality test using Kolmogorov Smirnov showed that the residual of co-parenting competence ($p = 0.11$) and parental mindfulness ($p = 0.07$) were normally distributed, ($p > .05$). Furthermore, the linearity test showed the significance value of deviation from linearity of co-parenting competence and parental mindfulness, $p = .301$ and $p = .082$, respectively. The variables had a linear relationship. Also, the tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values show that multicollinearity was not a concern (Parenting Competence, Parental Well-being = $.76, VIF = 1.31$; Parental Mindfulness, Parental Well-being = $.76, VIF = 1.31$). Furthermore, the results of the heteroscedasticity test showed there were no symptoms of heteroscedasticity in both co-parenting competence ($p = .08$) and parental mindfulness ($p = .18$).

Table 2 presents the result of multiple regression which examined the role of coparenting competence and parental mindfulness in predicting parental well-being simultaneously. The results of the multiple regression indicated the coparenting competence and parental mindfulness explained 15.7% of the parental well-being variance ($R^2 = 0.157, F(2, 329) = 30.52, p < .001$), see Table 2. It was found that coparenting competence significantly predicted parental well-being ($\beta = .21, p < .001$), as did parental mindfulness ($\beta = .25, p < .001$). An increase in one point on co-parenting competence corresponded, on average, to an increase in parental well-being score of $.21$ points. Also, for each point of parental mindfulness, parental well-being increased by 0.25 points. Effective contribution of co-parenting competence and parental mindfulness were 6.9% and 8.8% respectively.

Table 2. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Variable	R^2	F	$Sig.$	Regression Equation
Coparenting competence and parental mindfulness with parental well-being.	.121	23.008	<.001	$Y = .523 + .622 X1 + .739 X2$

Note: X1=coparenting competence; X2=parental mindfulness

Coparenting is the ability of parents to work together in carrying out the parenting role. When these competencies are applied effectively, fathers and mothers can support each other, share responsibility, encourage each other, provide the best care for children together, and reduce destructive conflicts (Atherton, 2017). This does not mean that conflicts and problems in parenting will completely disappear, it means that difficult situations

can instead be resolved through compromises and negotiations (Lamela, 2017; Mallette et al., 2019). Therefore, if one partner is having difficulties in parenting, they know someone is there to care and will help them find a way out together. Understanding makes the bond between parents stronger. As a result, it can reduce parenting stress and attachment anxiety to partners (Gerace, 2016). On the other hand, the lack of co-parenting competence causes an unequal division of parenting roles. One of the parents will receive heavier responsibilities. The problem can be the source of conflict in which one parent feels exhausted while the other is helpless or unsure about their parenting abilities (McHale et al., 2004).

Furthermore, this result may be supported by the fact that coparenting is not only related to the quality and stability of relationships between partners but also affects relationships with children as a triadic family system, so that all family members feel the warmth, positive affection, and a positive emotional climate (Feinberg et al., 2012). These conditions facilitate the increase in parental well-being. According to McConkey (2020), high parental well-being is characterized by positive mood conditions, emotional stability, satisfaction in carrying out parental roles, and feeling support from others, especially from partners. The results of this study indicate that coparenting competence can predict the level of parental well-being significantly.

Another important finding was that coparenting competence and parental mindfulness simultaneously affect parental well-being. Parental mindfulness means that parents are fully aware of each moment in their parent-child interactions. They accept children and other family members warmly, do not judge themselves and their children, are aware of the emotional conditions of themselves and their children, and can regulate behavior according to their parenting goals (Duncan et al., 2009). Parental mindfulness means they can control the situation that occurs at the moment, especially those related to parenting. Parents are able to sort out their expectations to match the actual conditions, so that parents will avoid the feelings of disappointment or other negative emotions (Christelle et al., 2016). In addition, when parents are in difficult or negative conditions, they will be able to regulate their emotions, and thus happiness can be obtained from themselves and not by depending on others (Coffey et al., 2010).

Moreover, parental problems or difficulties are often caused by children's behavior (Bögels et al., 2010), especially in early childhood that is related to frustration and discipline (Brooks, 2013). Mindful parents will realize the reasons behind the children's behavior, are sensitive to the children's physical and emotional condition, can address a problem calmly and not with excessive emotional reactivity. Therefore, parents will be able to accept, forgive, and show positive affection to their children. The parents' energy will be used effectively because they do not impose their will on the situation but understand its suitability, reducing the risk of emotional exhaustion (Singh, 2010). These results seem to be consistent with other research which found mindful parenting can improve the mental health of parents (Gouveia et al., 2016).

This present study suggests that the two variables that affect parental well-being are related to parenting skills. So, to improve the well-being of parents, they do not only focus on external factors such as social support and family income (Andayani et al., 2020), but they also need to pay attention to their ability in parenting practices. The challenges of raising children are varied and will continue to exist over time. Therefore, parents must learn continuously to improve their parenting skills to maintain their own well-being (Armstrong, 2005). These parenting competencies can be the main source of parents to direct behavior, improve adaptability, find effective solutions, in order to achieve harmonious family climate and higher family well-being (Khooshab et al 2016; Ajilchi et al., 2011).

The results of this study must be interpreted in light of its limitations. First, the distribution of research participants is concentrated in the city of Padang. Then, regarding the use of the convenience sampling method, this present study might not have been successful in controlling for all possible confounding variables, such as diverse family structures and socio-cultural context. Social and cultural settings certainly provide a different perspective on parents' well-being. For instance, Indonesians have a very high value on family. Several previous studies have shown that the main source of happiness and satisfaction in Indonesian society is family (Anggoro & Widhiarso., 2010). Their well-being will increase if they can provide benefits to the family (Maulana et al., 2018). Therefore, further research is warranted to investigate parental well-being in the context of Indonesian culture. Especially considering that most of the previous studies centered on western societies. Third, this study uses self-report to measure parenting competence. Participants may respond in a socially acceptable way (Demetriou, et al., 2015). Future researchers are encouraged to also use the observation method to investigate

parenting practices while parents are interacting with families. Nevertheless, this research has contributed to the understanding of parents' well-being. The results of this study indicate that parenting competence can predict the well-being of parents. Parents need to learn continuously and improve their parenting ability to feel positive emotions during parenting and be satisfied with their roles.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, parents' well-being can be improved by strengthening their parenting competencies, such as the ability to develop positive coparenting partnerships and to be fully present during parenting practice. Being able to build strong triadic relationships and be mutually involved with family members, as well as being aware of the moment by moment with their children can help parents maintain well-being and avoid prolonged negative effects. Despite the common image of parents that are drained by the intense daily routines of caring for young children, the present study shows that parents with early childhood children have a high level of well-being. No differences in well-being were found between fathers and mothers. These results suggest that parents' well-being is not only related to external conditions, but can also be predicted by their own parenting abilities, namely coparenting competence and parental mindfulness. Parents are advised to learn continuously and improve their parenting skills so that they can feel the pleasure and satisfaction of being a parent. Professional help and community services can also encourage parents in learning by providing effective parenting programs. Further research should be undertaken to investigate the other psychological sources of parents that may affect parents' well-being.

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