



Why Do Unemployed Housewives Experience Stress? Exploring the Triggering Factors

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review identifies factors contributing to stress in non-working housewives, a demographic often burdened by high domestic expectations and limited social recognition. While short-term stress can be beneficial, chronic stress, as seen in Housewife Syndrome, leads to exhaustion from monotonous routines, lack of support, social isolation, and role imbalance. We comprehensively searched academic databases like Scopus and Frontiers. Our analysis reveals that high domestic demands, insufficient social support, economic constraints, and pressure from traditional gender roles are key stressors. Understanding these factors provides crucial insights for developing social and psychological interventions aimed at improving the well-being of housewives.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the stress experienced by unemployed housewives is a crucial step in supporting the overall well-being of families (Patmisari et al., 2025). This phenomenon is not merely an individual problem but reflects complex social dynamics, cultural expectations, and economic realities, often concealing a significant psychological burden behind an idealized image. While previous studies have highlighted various aspects of this stress, a comprehensive, synthesized understanding of its diverse contributing factors and their interplay remains limited.

This systematic review uniquely contributes to knowledge enrichment by offering a holistic synthesis of biological, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing stress in unemployed housewives. It not only revisits and contextualizes concepts like "Housewife Syndrome" and the "second shift" in a contemporary global context but also identifies underexplored areas such as the impact of technology on isolation and the practicalities of equitable domestic burden sharing. By integrating these often-fragmented aspects, this research aims to provide a richer, deeper understanding, paving the way for more relevant and effective social and psychological support strategies.

This study aims to delve into the well-being of housewives and the factors impacting it, specifically by exploring stress among housewives using a systematic review method. Our goal is to gain a thorough understanding that can lead to recommendations for reducing their stress and enhancing overall well-being.

LITERATUR REVIEW

The prevalence of anxiety symptoms among housewives is notably high, often accompanied by fatigue and stress (Lebert-Charron et al., 2021). This underscores that the challenges faced by housewives extend beyond physical and mental exhaustion, potentially triggering more serious mental health disorders. Unvaried daily routines can induce stress and monotony, subconsciously fostering negative emotional turmoil that may disrupt household harmony, even escalating to domestic violence, child abuse, and divorce (Mashuril Anwar et al., 2020). This issue is particularly common among young, unemployed mothers with children (Fadlillah & Husniati, 2021). The domestic role, inherently assigned to women, is frequently associated with demanding expectations, often without acknowledging the significant emotional and physical burdens involved.

Stress in unemployed housewives arises from various interrelated triggers. This section provides a conceptual framework by elaborating on key theoretical constructs and empirical findings from previous research. The phenomenon of Housewife Syndrome, for instance, an older concept, is highly pertinent today, describing a state of physical and mental weariness caused by monotonous routines and insufficient recognition (Adams, 2020). Building on this, the concept of an "endless first shift" at home inherently creates a "second shift" of mental and emotional labor (Moulton et al., 2024; Rodriguez-Stanley et al., 2020). This highlights that domestic work is not solely a physical task but also a profound source of psychological strain, often unrecognized.

A critical, yet frequently overlooked, dimension is the lack of recognition for the value of domestic work (Kaplan, 2023; Purwanto, 2021). In societies where success is often measured by economic contribution, the role of unemployed housewives can be marginalized, leading to identity crises and low self-esteem (Vinasevaya & Puspitawati, 2022). Furthermore, financial dependence often creates an imbalance of power within the family, significantly limiting housewives' autonomy and decision-making capacity, which adds complex layers of stress (Dewayanti et al., 2023; Frankham et al., 2020)). Existing literature also points to research gaps concerning how differences in socio-economic and cultural backgrounds specifically influence the experience of stress in housewives, and the exploration of effective coping and resilience strategies (Durak et al., 2022; Mah et al., 2025). The limitations in activities outside the home can hinder the fulfillment of Maslow's (1970) self-actualization needs, contributing to feelings of stagnation and deep dissatisfaction that are rarely explored in this specific context. Emerging areas for investigation include the role of technology and social media in either exacerbating or reducing social isolation, and practical models for more equitable domestic burden sharing (Rasoulzadeh Aghdam et al., 2024). By systematically synthesizing these aspects, we aim to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding.

METHODOLOGY

The approach used in this study is systematic review, which aims to collect, evaluate, and synthesize the results of previous studies on stress risk factors in housewives. This process involves several stages, starting from identifying data sources to thematic analysis of relevant findings (Putri, 2021).

Literature search was conducted using several trusted academic databases, namely Scopus. Literature search began by formulating review questions with the PICO formulation (Population/problem, Intervention/exposure, Comparison, Outcome) (PICO & PEO Research, 2024). The research question in this review is "what are the factors that can cause stress in non-working housewives?" The main keywords used in the search include terms such as "housewiv*" OR "stay-at-home mother*" OR homemaker OR "nonworking mother" AND "stress" AND "mental health" AND Boolean combinations to optimize search results. In addition, additional literature was also obtained through manual searches of references from Frontier, Spring Nature, Google Scholar. The next stage is to download all journals found and check for duplication using the Rayyan website. After checking for duplication, the selection process is carried out in several stages. First, the title and abstract of each article found are screened to determine its relevance to the research topic. Articles that are considered relevant are then checked for full text to ensure that they meet the inclusion criteria that have been set.

This review only included studies with observational designs, focusing on stress-causing factors in housewives. Review articles, editorials, or studies with incomplete data were excluded from the analysis. Once relevant articles were identified, data were systematically extracted. Our analysis primarily aimed to categorize factors influencing stress in unemployed housewives into key groups

like biological, genetic, environmental, and psychosocial. We used a descriptive approach to thoroughly illustrate how each factor contributes. Because review studies on this subject are limited in Indonesia, we included all available research from any period until April 2025, the time of screening. Researchers systematically searched chosen databases with defined keywords. After narrowing down articles by title and abstract, a thorough full-text evaluation of the remaining ones was conducted, applying all inclusion and exclusion criteria.

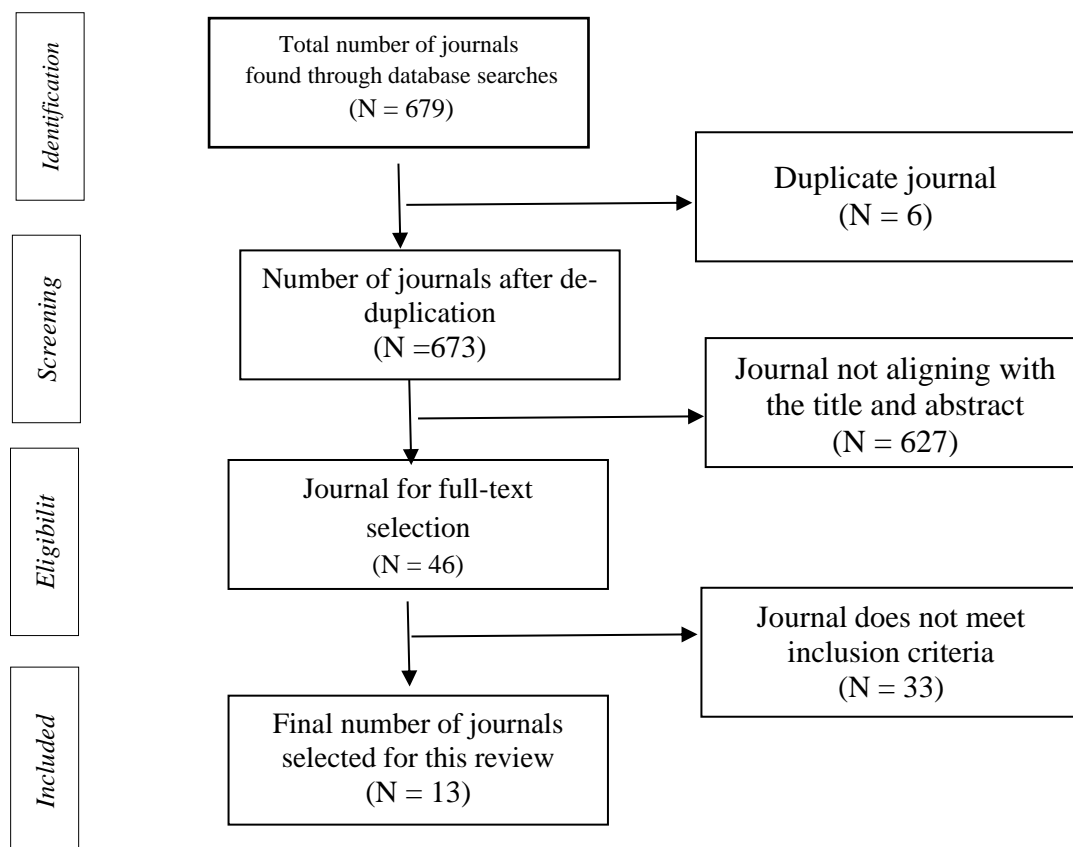


Figure 1. PRISMA Chart for Juornal Selection Flow

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stress in the population of unemployed housewives is a complex psychological phenomenon and is impacted by a range of interconnected elements. In the context of unemployed housewives, these demands can come from a variety of sources, including role pressures inherent in domestic and caregiving responsibilities, limited social interactions that can potentially lead to isolation, and socio-economic conditions that can affect feelings of control and autonomy.

Recent research suggests that lack of recognition for housework and caregiving can contribute to feelings of worthlessness and loss of identity outside of motherhood(Kaplan, 2023). In a social context still influenced by patriarchal values, women are expected to play a dual role: as the primary caregiver at home while, in some cases, contributing economically (Rahmayati, 2020). This burden can lead to prolonged stress, which known by the term Housewife Syndrome, a term used in America around the mid-20th century. Describes a condition in

which housewives feel very unhappy with their roles, a condition in which housewives experience physical and emotional exhaustion due to monotonous routines and minimal social recognition (Adams, 2020)

Table 1 Table of Factors Causing Stress in Housewives

| No | Author | Year | Subject | Causal Factor | Country |
|----|---|------|---|--|---------|
| 1 | Urvashi, Sangeeta Girdhar, Anurag Chaudhary, Sanjay Gupta, Shamim Monga | 2019 | 300 housewives | Psychological stress and anxiety mediated by feelings of depression, loneliness, and fatigue among housewives. | India |
| 2 | M. Durak, E. Senol-Durak & S. Karakose | 2022 | 500 housewives aged between 20 and 70 years old | Anxiety is mediated by perceived stress, loneliness, and fatigue among housewives. | Turki |
| 3 | Veysel Kaplan | 2023 | 371 housewives | Levels of emotional dependence (codependency) and negative self-perception among housewives. | Turki |
| 4 | Dr. Manikamma N. Sultanpur | 2021 | 50 housewives who are unemployed & 50 housewives who are employed | Level of control over household work conditions, household stress, the level of support they receive from others in the household such as spouses/family, and the strategies used to perform household work. | India |
| 6 | Selin Karakose, Ayse Nehir Ulusoy | 2022 | 388 housewives aged 20–65 years old | A boring and exhausting home environment, lack of support, and | Turki |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|------|--|---|-------|
| | | | | somatization fatigue. | |
| 7 | Rui Dias, Mohammad Irfan, Ankita Saxena, Khusboo Srivastava, Rosa Galvão, Miguel Varela | 2024 | 407 housewives | Insufficient emotional backing from partners, juggling daily household tasks with extra duties at home, experiencing both mental and physical exhaustion, and handling the family budget. | India |
| 8 | Rashidi, Farzaneh & Doulabi, Mahbobeh & Mahmoodi, Zohreh | 2022 | 417 housewives aged 21–30 years old | Low marital satisfaction | Iran |
| 9 | Rattan MK & Sood M | 2022 | 40 housewives | Age of the housewife, socioeconomic status | India |
| 10 | Eri Maeda, Kyoko Nomura, Osamu Hiraike, Hiroki Sugimori, Asako Kinoshita & Yutaka Osuga | | 500 housewives with children & 500 housewives without childred | High demands of household chores, lack of control over household chores, low household income, caring for family members, not having children, lack of support from parents or in-laws. | China |
| 11 | Johny Kutty Joseph | 2019 | 10 housewives who are not working & 10 housewives who are | Self-perception, perceptions of others, role performance, views on life, lifestyle practices, | India |

| | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|--|-------|
| | | | working and do not have children | social relationships, and financial status | |
| 12 | Namrata Panwar & Swati Srivastava | 2019 | 78 Hindu housewives | Neglect of talents, lack of family support financial insecurity, inequality at home, low self-esteem, and partner ego. | India |
| 13 | Irasangappa Mudakavi | 2017 | 100 housewives aged 20-45 years old | Monthly family income level, the majority of stressors that are not related to housewives' work come from the family, followed by the individual themselves, and thirdly from the environment or community.. | India |

This workload, especially tasks such as washing and cleaning, contributes to stress and decreased quality of life (Singh & Singh, 2023). Manifestations of housework stress vary, including feelings of being overwhelmed, irritable, frustrated, anxious, sad, depressed (Ardiansyah et al., 2023; Grover et al., 2019; Panwar & Srivastava, 2019) sleep disturbances, chronic fatigue, headaches, and muscle pain (Fiqih Sabna Ruka et al., 2024; Grover et al., 2019; Kivimäki et al., 2023; Sitompul, 2020; Valsamakis et al., 2019). Without adequate recognition and support, ongoing pressure can lead to anxiety, chronic stress, and depression (AlKhathami, 2024). While also diminishing self-esteem and self-efficacy (Hakim, 2022).

Stress in housewives is a multidimensional issue influenced by internal psychological factors such as dissatisfaction with repetitive routines, feelings of loneliness due to limited social interaction, and lack of recognition (Panwar & Srivastava, 2019). Self esteem low is also a major trigger, causing an identity crisis and prolonged emotional burden because domestic work is often considered less socially valuable (Kaplan, 2023; Purwanto, 2021; Vinasevaya & Puspitawati, 2022). Unemployed housewives are prone to fatigue due to busy routines, ideal expectations, poor time management, status burdens, and lack of attention and understanding from their husbands (Fadlillah & Husniati, 2021). They are more

prone to stress and depression due to monotonous routines and social isolation (Bani-Issa et al., 2022; Negari, 2020). Lack of opportunities for activities outside the home hinders the fulfillment of self-growth needs (Mah et al., 2025) causing stagnation and dissatisfaction with life (Durak et al., 2022).

External social and environmental factors include heavy household workload and conditions, lack of control, and lack of emotional support from partners (Dias et al., 2024; Maeda et al., 2019; Sultanpur, 2021). Lack of social interaction outside the home limits access to emotional support, triggering isolation (Acoba, 2024; Aghdam et al., 2024; Pardede & Kovač, 2023; Sahrawat, 2024). Role imbalance in the home ladder is also associated with feelings of underappreciation (Kaplan, 2023). Changes in family dynamics, such as the burden of caring for young children or the challenges of older children, add to stress, especially without the support of a partner (Amici et al., 2022; Holopainen et al., 2025; Prasasti et al., 2023). When work remains unacknowledged and unappreciated, it creates an invisible burden that can lead to physical and emotional burnout, often conceptualized as a 'second shift' of mental strain (Kaplan, 2023; Moulton et al., 2024; Panwar & Srivastava, 2019; Rodriguez-Stanley et al., 2020)

Economic and relational factors including modern social and economic changes increase domestic expectations while encouraging women to contribute outside the home (Harahap & Jailani, 2024; Mussida & Patimo, 2021). Financial dependence triggers economic helplessness and anxiety, creating an imbalance of power within the family that increases stress (Dewayanti et al., 2023; Frankham et al., 2020). The quality of family relationships, characterized by poor communication, conflict, and lack of support, is a source of stress (Işık & Kaya, 2022; Maturbongs et al., 2021). Conversely, positive relationships marked by open communication and robust support (particularly from a spouse) act as an effective buffer against stress (Akaroğlu, 2023). Husband's support is also important in reducing burnout (DURAK & DURAK, 2020). Understanding these factors, including individual vulnerabilities such as perfectionism, neuroticism (Cooks & Ciesla, 2019) mechanisms coping maladaptive (Kang & Gong, 2024), and history of mental health problems (Akil & Nestler, 2023) are essential for identifying vulnerable housewives and designing appropriate interventions

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Stress in housewives is a complex problem influenced by various psychological, social, economic, and situational factors. Research in various countries such as India, Turkey, Iran, and China consistently shows that psychological stress, anxiety, feelings of depression, loneliness, and burnout are the main causes. High household workload, lack of emotional and social support, and less conducive home environment conditions also contribute significantly to stress levels.

In addition, internal factors such as negative self-perception, low self-esteem, emotional dependence, and problems in marital relationships also play an important role. Low socioeconomic status, financial insecurity, and demands for taking care of children or other family members further increases the burden

of stress. Research also highlights the importance of the level of control over household chores and effective coping strategies in mitigating stress experienced by housewives. Therefore, comprehensive support from family, society, and supportive policies is needed to improve the mental and emotional well-being of housewives.

FURTHER STUDY

Every research has limitations, and this systematic review is no exception. Future investigations should conduct in-depth empirical studies to capture nuanced experiences of housewife stress, particularly in diverse cultural contexts. Further research is also needed to explore the role of technology and social media in mitigating or exacerbating isolation, and to identify effective models for equitable domestic burden sharing. Finally, developing and testing the efficacy of targeted social and psychological interventions based on the identified stressors is crucial to advance the well-being of housewives.

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