



The Impact of Loneliness on Stress in Highly Educated Unemployed Housewives Post-Marriage: Social Support as a Moderator

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<p>*Ravina Saraswaty ravinasaraswaty1911@gmail.com</p> <p>Article History</p> <p>Submitted : April 24th, 2025</p> <p>Final Revised : July 1st, 2025</p> <p>Accepted : August 3rd, 2025</p> <div data-bbox="156 1099 445 1160"></div> <p><i>This is an open access article under the CC-BY license</i> Copyright ©2025 by Author, Published by Jurnal Psikologi Teori dan Terapan</p>	<p>Background: Individuals with higher educational backgrounds often hold higher standards in evaluating social relationships, making them more vulnerable to isolation when intellectual and emotional support is lacking. Objective: This study aims to examine the effect of loneliness on stress among highly educated, non-working housewives and to explore the moderating role of social support. Method: A non-experimental cross-sectional design was used with a non-probability convenience sampling technique. Participants were housewives aged 25–40. Data were collected using validated questionnaires: MSPSS, UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3), and PSS-10. Results: Loneliness showed a positive significant relationship with stress, indicating higher loneliness correlates with higher stress. The regression coefficient for social support in relation to stress was significantly positive, meanwhile social support negatively correlated with loneliness but did not significantly affect stress or moderate the relationship between loneliness and stress. Conclusion: The study concludes that loneliness significantly contributes to increased stress, while social support does not significantly reduce stress, possibly due to other moderating factors like relationship quality or personality traits.</p> <p>Keywords: Higher education; loneliness; social support; stress; unemployed housewives.</p>

Abstrak

Latar belakang: Individu dengan pendidikan tinggi cenderung memiliki standar tinggi dalam menjalin relasi sosial, sehingga lebih rentan mengalami isolasi saat dukungan intelektual dan emosional kurang. **Tujuan:** Meneliti pengaruh kesepian terhadap stres pada ibu rumah tangga berpendidikan tinggi yang tidak bekerja, serta mengeksplorasi peran moderasi dukungan sosial. **Metode:** Penelitian kuantitatif dengan desain potong lintang dan teknik convenience sampling. Partisipan adalah ibu rumah tangga usia 25–40 tahun, minimal lulusan diploma, tidak bekerja atau berhenti bekerja setelah menikah, hanya mengurus rumah tangga, telah menikah minimal tiga tahun, dan memiliki pengalaman kerja minimal satu tahun. Instrumen yang digunakan yaitu MSPSS, UCLA Loneliness Scale versi 3, dan PSS-10. **Hasil:** Kesepian berhubungan positif dan signifikan dengan stres, menunjukkan semakin tinggi kesepian, semakin tinggi stres. Dukungan sosial berkorelasi negatif dengan kesepian, tetapi tidak berpengaruh signifikan terhadap stres maupun memoderasi hubungan kesepian dan stres. **Kesimpulan:** Kesepian berkontribusi signifikan terhadap stres, sementara dukungan sosial tidak berperan sebagai pelindung, kemungkinan dipengaruhi oleh faktor lain seperti kualitas hubungan atau kepribadian.

Kata Kunci: Berpendidikan tinggi; dukungan sosial; ibu rumah tangga yang tidak bekerja; kesepian; stres

Introduction

Women across the globe are increasingly gaining access to higher education, with participation rates now surpassing those of men and significantly contributing to various sectors (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2021). In Indonesia, the female participation rate in higher education reached 44.8% in 2021 (BPS, 2021). This reflects the vast potential of women to achieve academic excellence and make meaningful contributions to society. The shift in social paradigms regarding women's education in Indonesia also demonstrates a positive transformation in public perceptions about women's roles and opportunities in education (Ardiansyah, Jailani, & Isma, 2024).

Nevertheless, many highly educated women choose to become full-time homemakers despite their potential for professional careers. This decision is influenced by various factors, including cultural norms, social expectations, and the desire to prioritize the family (Suparno et al., 2023; Wulantami & Ruwaida, 2016). However, the transition from a professional career to domestic roles often leads to feelings of isolation and identity loss (Schmitt et al., 2008). Highly educated homemakers tend to experience loneliness and stress due to limited social interaction and the loss of opportunities for professional self-actualization (Sari et al. 2016).

The loneliness experienced by these women is unique in that it stems from a sense of disconnection from the outside world, which was once accessible through education and employment. They often feel a loss of autonomy and meaningful social contribution (Green et al., 2021; Mariyanti et al., 2021). Moreover, intellectual loneliness, caused by a lack of cognitive stimulation, further exacerbates their mental health (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018). The burden of domestic responsibilities, when not supported by adequate social support, may intensify these pressures and lead to heightened stress (Kossek & Ozeki, 2008; Hidayati et al., 2021).

Stress among highly educated homemakers may emerge when they feel confined within domestic roles without recognition of their academic and professional competencies. Societal pressures to fulfill traditional roles as ideal mothers and wives often lead to stress and feelings of inadequacy (Lupton, 2002; Rubin and Wooten, 2007). Strong social support from both family and the community is crucial for mitigating the effects of stress and loneliness. Emotional support enhances the psychological well-being of homemakers (Cohen, 2004; Umberson & Montez, 2010).

However, family-based support alone may not suffice in addressing the stress experienced by highly educated homemakers, as individual characteristics such as openness to new experiences and neuroticism also influence the effectiveness of such support (Carstensen, 1995). Women who feel intellectually undervalued are more susceptible to feelings of isolation (Van Tilburg et al., 2020). Therefore, social support, which includes emotional backing and intellectual recognition, is essential for fulfilling psychological needs.

Self-perception also significantly affects the mental health of highly educated female homemakers. Negative self-perceptions or views of their role within the family may exacerbate feelings of stress and loneliness (Kaplan, 2023). Adequate social support can help them overcome such feelings and improve their quality of life. Moreover, engagement in social and community activities can foster a sense of connection and reduce isolation (Thoits, 2011).

Although many homemakers receive support from their families, a considerable number still feel underappreciated for their contributions at home, which can worsen their stress and loneliness (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Studies indicate that stress among highly educated homemakers is strongly related to the discrepancy between expectations and the reality of receiving support that aligns with their specific needs (Taylor and Stanton, 2007). Intellectual loneliness, in particular, can intensify feelings of isolation and elevate stress levels (Peplau & Perlman, 1982).

There is a noticeable gap in research on the impact of higher education on stress and loneliness among homemakers with advanced educational backgrounds. Most psychological studies tend to focus on working or non-working homemakers without examining how higher education specifically affects their well-being (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Further research is needed to explore the role of social support in alleviating stress and loneliness among this population. This study addresses the limited research in Indonesia on social support for highly educated, non-working homemakers by examining the potential impact of loneliness on stress and exploring whether social support functions as a mediator or moderator in this relationship.

Method

This study employs a quantitative approach with a non-experimental, cross-sectional design, where data collection occurred at a single point in time from a group of respondents consisting of highly educated unemployed housewives. This design is considered appropriate for analyzing the relationship between loneliness and stress variables and exploring the role of social support in relation to these variables (Hidayah & Salmiyati, 2023). The sampling method used in this study was non-probability sampling with a convenience sampling technique. This method involves selecting respondents based on ease of access and availability, provided that they meet the research criteria. It was chosen for its efficiency in terms of time and cost, allowing the researcher to reach highly educated unemployed housewives through communities, social media, or alumni groups. However, the use of convenience sampling also carries the risk of selection bias and limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of highly educated unemployed housewives. This limitation should be considered when interpreting the results, as the sample may not fully represent all individuals in this demographic group (Etikan et al., 2016).

Sample or Population

The target population in this study possessed several specific characteristics: (1) women who are housewives with a higher education background (at least a diploma degree); (2) those who stopped working after marriage and are not currently employed, either formally or informally, and/or are solely engaged in domestic activities or daily household tasks; (3) aged between 25 and 40 years; (4) have been married for at least three years; and (5) have had at least one year of professional work experience. The data in this study were collected through an online questionnaire using Google Forms. The data collection steps included: (1) distributing the questionnaire via social media, housewife community groups, and personal networks; (2) providing an explanation to respondents regarding the purpose of the study, data confidentiality, and the importance of their participation; and (3) independent completion of the questionnaire within approximately ± 15 –20 minutes. The researcher monitored the completion process to ensure a proper understanding of the instructions and data completeness. Incomplete, duplicate, or non-compliant questionnaires were removed from the dataset, and reminders were sent periodically to achieve the desired sample size. A total of 323 participants completed the questionnaires. After data screening, the final number of participants was 261.

Data Measurement

In this study, the researchers used the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) instrument developed by Zimet et al. (1988), which was translated and adapted to the Indonesian cultural context by Sulistiani, Fajrianthi, and Kristiana (2022). The MSPSS has three dimensions of measurement: support from family, friends, and significant others. The loneliness variable in this study was measured using the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3, developed by Daniel W. Russell in 1996. This measuring instrument was translated into Indonesian and culturally adapted by Sari in 2010. UCLA measures three dimensions as well, it mentions the personality, social desirability and depression for the loneliness score. Researchers used the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) with perceived helplessness and perceived self-efficacy as the dimensions, an instrument developed by Cohen et al. in 1983, and is widely used to measure stress levels based on an individual's perception of various situations in their life. This scale has been translated and adapted into Indonesian by Hakim, Mora, Leometa, and Dimala in 2024. These tools have been culturally adapted to the Indonesian context and have demonstrated strong reliability and validity in measuring perceived social support, loneliness, and stress. All three instruments were designed to assess respondents' subjective perceptions, not objective conditions, which aligns with the study's emphasis on understanding psychological experiences.

All three instruments used in this study showed good measurement quality. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's alpha values, which indicated that the MSPSS had an alpha of 0.929, the PSS-10 scored 0.761, and the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 had an alpha of 0.796. As all values exceeded the 0.6 threshold, the instruments were considered highly reliable and capable of producing consistent results. Validity testing was carried out through Corrected Item-Total Correlation analysis, with the results compared to a critical *r*-table value of 0.202. The findings revealed that the MSPSS items had validity scores ranging from 0.265 to 0.552, the PSS-10 scores ranged from 0.296 to 0.513, and the UCLA Loneliness Scale scores ranged from 0.592 to 0.774. As all values exceeded the critical threshold, it can be concluded that each item on the three instruments was valid and appropriate for measuring the intended constructs.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using JASP statistical software. Several data analysis techniques were employed to examine the data collected for this study. Descriptive analysis was used to outline the respondent characteristics and calculate the average scores for perceived social support, loneliness, and stress. Classical assumption tests were conducted to ensure that the regression models met the statistical criteria for unbiased estimation. Spearman correlation analysis (Spearman) was performed to examine the relationships among the three variables. To address the study's emphasis on direct and indirect relationships, multiple linear regression was used to test the direct effect of loneliness on stress and the direct effect of social support on stress.

In addition, mediation analysis was conducted to test the indirect effect, specifically to assess whether social support mediated the relationship between loneliness and stress. Moderation analysis was also conducted to examine whether social support acts as a moderator that can buffer or weaken the negative effect of loneliness on stress. These analyses allowed the researcher to comprehensively evaluate both the mediating and moderating roles of social support, in line with the study's aim of exploring its potential protective functions.

Result

This study involved 261 highly educated housewives who were not employed after marriage, aged 25–40 years. The majority of participants were aged between 30 and 34 years (76.76%), followed by those aged 25–29 years (16.72%) and 35–40 years (5.7%). Most participants held a bachelor's degree (77.01%), while 19.54% had a diploma (D3) and 3.44% held a master's degree (S2). In terms of domicile, the majority resided in DKI Jakarta (40.99%), followed by West Java (29.50%) and Central Java (14.56%), with others located in East Java, Yogyakarta, Banten/Tangerang, and East Kalimantan.

Table 1. Participant Personal Demographic Data

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	25 - 29	44	16.72
	30 - 34	202	76.76
	35 - 40	15	5.7
Education	Diploma 3	51	19.54
	Bachelor	201	77.01
	Master	9	3.44
Domicile	DKI Jakarta	107	40.99
	West Java	77	29.5
	Central Java	38	14.55
	Tangerang/Banten	17	6.51
	East Java	14	5.36
	DI Yogyakarta	7	2.68
	East Kalimantan	1	0.38

Regarding marital duration, most participants had been married for 3–5 years, peaking at 4 years (31.41%). The majority had one child (75.10%), while a smaller proportion had no children (8.05%) or more than two children (3.07%). Most participants lived with their spouses and children (77.01%), while a minority resided with their extended families or others. Regarding proximity to their extended family, 60.92% lived far away, 19.92% lived nearby, and 19.16% lived with their extended family. Regarding satisfaction with their role as housewives, 67.82% reported being satisfied and 25.29% reported being very satisfied. Only 6.13% felt less satisfied, and 0.77% reported being not satisfied at all.

Table 2. Participants in Marriage Conditions

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Marriage age	3 year	56	21.45
	4 year	82	31.41
	5 year	69	26.437
	6 year	34	13.02
	7 tahun	5	1.91
	8 year	3	1.14
	> 8 year	12	4.59
Number of children	1 child	196	75.09
	2 children	36	13.79
	3 children	6	2.29
	> 3 children	2	0.76
	None	21	8.04
Live together with	Spouse	19	7.28
	Spouse and Kids	201	77.01
	Etc	41	15.70
Proximity with Extended family	Nearby	52	19.92
	Far away	159	60.92
	Living together	50	19.15
Satisfaction with their role as housewives	Not satisfied	2	0.77
	Less satisfied	16	6.13
	Satisfied	177	67.81
	Very satisfied	66	25.28

Most respondents (69.35%) stopped working within 1–3 years after marriage, while 22.22% quit within the first year after marriage. The primary reason for leaving work was personal choice (64.75%), followed by spousal (31.41%) and parental (3.82%) requests. Regarding the desire to return to work, 54.02% expressed no intention to do so, while 45.98% wished to re-enter the workforce.

Table 3. Participants Work History

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Last period of work	< 1 year after married	58	22.22
	1-3 year after married	181	69.34
	4-6 year after married	13	4.98
	> 7 year after married	5	1.91
	Never work after married	4	1.53
Primary reason for leaving work	Personal choice	169	64.75
	Spousal request	82	31.41
	Parental request	10	3.82
Desire to return to work	Yes	120	46
	No	141	54

Socially, nearly all participants (97.70%) reported having close friends, and 61.69% were active in community groups, such as neighborhood associations, women's organizations, or religious activities. Most communicated with friends at least once a week (37.17%), although 27.97% reported no communication at all. The majority (67.43%) reported receiving family support quite frequently, and 26.05% received it very frequently.

Table 4. Participants Social Conditions

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Having close friends	Yes	252	96.55
	No	6	2.29
Active in community group	Yes	161	37.54
	No	98	61.68
Communication with friends	Rarely	17	6.51
	Once a month	70	26.82
	Once a week	97	37.16
	Every day	4	1.53
	Never	73	27.96
Receiving support from big family	Very frequently	68	26.05
	Frequently	176	67.43
	Rarely	16	6.13
	Never	1	0.38

The analysis included 261 participants who provided complete data on all three research variables: loneliness (UCLA), stress (PSS-10), and social support (MSPSS). No missing data were observed. The mean loneliness score was 53.68 (SD = 3.02), indicating a relatively high level of loneliness among the participants. The mean stress score was 24.25 (SD = 2.90), suggesting that most of the participants experienced moderate to high levels of stress. The mean score for social support was 3.08 (SD = 0.82), reflecting a moderate level of perceived social support.

The range of scores indicated variations in participants' psychological perceptions and experiences: loneliness ranged from 45 to 61, stress from 13 to 38, and social support from 1.60 to 7.00. The Shapiro-Wilk normality test revealed that all three variables were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$), leading to the use of nonparametric tests for subsequent analyses.

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between the variables. A positive correlation was found between loneliness and stress ($r = 0.360$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that increased loneliness was associated with higher stress. Social support was negatively correlated with both loneliness ($r = -0.399$, $p < 0.001$) and stress ($r = -0.292$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that greater social support was associated with lower levels of loneliness and stress.

Table 5. Corellation Test

		Loneliness	Stress	Social Support
Loneliness	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	-		
	<i>p-value</i>	-		
Stress	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	0.360***	-	
	<i>p-value</i>	<.001	-	
Social Support	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	-0.399*	0.292***	-
	<i>p-value</i>	<.001	<.001	-

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between loneliness, social support, and stress. The initial regression results showed that loneliness was positively associated with

stress ($R = 0.378$; $R^2 = 0.146$), indicating that 14.6% of the variance in stress could be explained by loneliness. Although the regression model was statistically significant ($F = 43.104$; $p < 0.001$), the regression coefficient for loneliness ($\beta = 0.212$; $p = 0.077$) was not statistically significant at the 5% level, indicating that the direct effect was not conclusively supported.

Table 6. Moderation Regression Test

Statistic	Score
R	0.378
R^2	0.146
Variance could be explained (%)	14.6%
Variance couldn't be explained (%)	85.4%

Interestingly, the regression coefficient for social support in relation to stress was significantly positive ($\beta = 0.146$; $p = 0.041$), contrary to the initial hypothesis, which expected a protective effect of social support. This suggests that, in this context, perceived social support was associated with increased rather than decreased stress levels. Interaction analysis showed that social support did not moderate the relationship between loneliness and stress ($\beta = 0.002$; $p = 0.982$). Mediation analysis also indicated that social support did not significantly mediate the relationship between loneliness and stress (estimate = -0.020 , $p = 0.297$).

Table 7. Coefficiency Regression Test

Variable	Coefficient	<i>p-value</i>	Significance	Interpretation
Loneliness	0.212	0.077	Not Significant	Positive relationship, but not significant
Social support	0.146	0.041	Significant	Positive relationship, contrary to hypothesis
Interaction of loneliness and social support	0.002	0.982	Not Significant	There is no moderating effect on the relationship between loneliness and stress levels.

Further path analysis revealed that loneliness had a significant positive effect on stress (estimate = 0.382 ; $p < 0.001$) and a negative association with social support (estimate = -0.087 ; $p < 0.001$). However, social support did not have a significant direct effect on stress (estimate = 0.227 , $p = 0.288$). The total effect of loneliness on stress remained significant (estimate = 0.363 ; $p < 0.001$), reinforcing loneliness as a key predictor of stress. Additional analysis of the control variables showed that depression had the strongest influence on stress ($t = 6.715$; $p < 0.001$), followed by personality traits ($t = 2.121$; $p = 0.035$), while social desirability was not significant ($t = 1.785$; $p = 0.075$).

Table 8. Path Coefficients Test

Hubungan	Estimate	<i>p-value</i>	Significance	Interpretation
Social support → Stress	0.227	0.288	Not Significant	Social support does not significantly reduce stress
Loneliness → Social support	-0.087	<0.001	Significant	The higher the loneliness, the lower the perceived social support

An analysis of the dimensions of social support (family, friends, and significant others) found that none had a significant effect on either loneliness or stress (all $p > 0.05$), indicating that no specific aspect of social support dominated the influence of emotional well-being in this population. Finally, demographic

comparisons revealed no significant differences in loneliness. However, significant differences in stress levels were found based on community involvement, and social support levels varied significantly according to the number of children, community engagement, and residential location.

Discussion

This section provides an in-depth discussion of the findings by referring to relevant theories and previous studies. The discussion elaborates on the implications of the results and compares them with existing literature to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of loneliness on stress and the role of social support as a protective or mediating factor among highly educated housewives who are not employed after marriage.

The present study found that loneliness has a positive and significant influence on stress levels among highly educated housewives who are not employed after marriage. In other words, the more intense the sense of loneliness, the higher the level of stress reported. This result aligns with previous findings that highlight loneliness as a major psychological stressor in adulthood (Cacioppo and Cacioppo, 2018; Hawkey and Cacioppo, 2010). Individuals who feel socially isolated tend to experience greater emotional strain due to a lack of meaningful social connections and limited emotional support (Cacioppo, Cacioppo, Capitanio, & Cole, 2015). Loneliness may elevate stress through various psychological mechanisms, such as heightened sensitivity to social threats and a decline in emotional well-being (Heinrich and Gullone, 2006).

Loneliness can trigger stress responses, as socially isolated individuals often struggle with emotional regulation, experience difficulty in managing their feelings, and show increased levels of stress-related hormones, such as cortisol (Hawkey & Capitanio, 2015). Such conditions may result in adverse consequences, including a heightened risk of psychological disorders, such as anxiety and depression, as well as various physical health problems associated with chronic stress. Although loneliness tends to increase stress, its impact may vary depending on individual characteristics and the availability of social support (Cacioppo et al., 2015).

Among highly educated housewives who are not working, loneliness may stem from limited social interactions, feelings of being undervalued by their environment, and a mismatch between personal expectations and the realities of their daily lives. Previous research has shown that individuals without socially recognized roles tend to experience greater loneliness than those who actively engage in social or professional activities (Luo et al., 2012). Therefore, loneliness can be considered a risk factor for increased psychological distress in this population.

Interestingly, the findings of this study indicate that social support was not a significant moderator of the relationship between loneliness and stress. This suggests that, although social support is generally recognized as a protective factor against the negative effects of loneliness, this role was not statistically significant in the current context. This finding contradicts several previous studies that have asserted that social support can buffer the adverse impact of loneliness on stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Uchino, 2006). However, other research highlights that the effectiveness of social support greatly depends on how individuals perceive the quality of support they receive (Thoits, 2011).

Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that the relationship between social support and stress levels was not statistically significant. In other words, the mere presence of social support does not directly contribute to reducing perceived stress. This result aligns with the theory of social support effectiveness, which emphasizes that the critical factor is not simply the availability of support but the extent to which the support is perceived as relevant and helpful by the individual receiving it (House et al., 1988). In the context of highly educated housewives who are not employed, feelings of being undervalued, loss of professional identity, and social pressure may hinder the effectiveness of social support in alleviating stress (Simon, 2002).

The study also revealed that only 14.6% of the variance in stress levels could be explained by loneliness, while the remaining 85.7% was influenced by other variables not included in the current model. This suggests that stress experienced by highly educated housewives who are not working is likely shaped by a range of additional factors such as economic pressures, domestic role burdens, and societal expectations (Allen et al., 2015). Statistically, loneliness significantly influenced stress, although its effect was not dominant when considered in isolation. This indicates that while loneliness can act as a trigger for stress, it is not the sole or most powerful factor.

Additionally, the study found that loneliness not only correlated with stress levels but also negatively impacted the amount of social support received. In other words, the higher the degree of loneliness a person experiences, the lower their level of social support they tend to receive. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that individuals who feel lonely often withdraw from social interactions and face

difficulties building and maintaining healthy social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). A lack of engagement in positive social relationships can exacerbate loneliness and elevate the risk of stress and other mental health problems (Cornwell & Waite, 2009).

For highly educated housewives who choose not to work after marriage, loneliness may arise from significant role transitions in their lives. Previously, they may have had broader social networks through professional or academic activities. However, after marriage and leaving the workforce, their opportunities for social interaction become increasingly limited. This change can lead to feelings of loss of identity as a professional and reduce opportunities to share experiences beyond the immediate family environment. This is consistent with the role transition theory, which posits that changes in employment status can significantly affect an individual's psychological well-being (Super, 1980).

This study demonstrates that personality traits also contribute to the level of stress experienced by highly educated housewives who discontinued their careers after marriage. Individuals with high levels of neuroticism within this group tend to be more susceptible to psychological distress due to their sensitivity to negative emotions and their tendency to adopt less adaptive coping strategies (Cho et al., 2013). Conversely, those with higher levels of openness to experience tend to possess a greater capacity to adapt to challenging situations. These findings are consistent with previous research asserting that various personality dimensions influence individual responses to stress (Tıraşoğlu & İpek, 2019). Furthermore, other studies have shown that individuals with high neuroticism and low psychological resilience are more vulnerable to long-term stress (Ebstrup, Eplov, Pisinger, & Jørgensen, 2011).

Depression was the most dominant factor influencing stress. This finding aligns with the depression dimension of the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3, which reflects feelings of hopelessness, profound sadness, and decreased interest in social activities. Housewives experiencing depression are more likely to perceive their social environment negatively, which, in turn, exacerbates the stress they experience. Consequently, prolonged loneliness can intensify depressive symptoms, contributing to an overall increase in stress levels. Meanwhile, the social desirability dimension of the same instrument indicates that although individuals may be motivated to conform to social norms or expectations, this does not directly influence their stress levels. Previous research also suggests that the effect of social desirability on stress tends to be situational, depending on the social context and external pressures encountered (Paulhus, 1984). Therefore, it can be concluded that other psychosocial factors, such as social support or coping strategies, play a more significant role in determining stress levels than the need for social acceptance.

Career development theory, as proposed by Parson (1909, as cited in Ani, 2017), emphasizes the importance of individual character and personality as key factors in career decision making. According to Gibson (2011, as cited in Ani, 2017), a thorough and objective understanding of oneself serves as the fundamental basis for designing a career development path. In this context, recognizing the specific characteristics, traits, and personalities of women can assist them in making more suitable career decisions. An initial step in supporting women in choosing their career paths is to understand their core personal attributes. Although each individual possesses unique qualities, this approach remains relevant as a valuable consideration in the career assessment process.

This study found no significant correlation between social support and stress. In other words, although individuals may receive support from their surrounding environment, such support does not automatically lead to a reduction in the stress they experience. This finding contradicts the initial assumption that social support mitigates stress. Previous research has indicated that social support can serve as a buffer against psychological distress, assist individuals in managing stress, and provide a sense of security when facing life challenges (Cohen & Wills, 1985). One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that the support received by highly educated housewives who are not employed may be insufficient or misaligned with their emotional and psychological requirements. If the assistance provided is not relevant to the problems faced or is not perceived as meaningful support, its effectiveness in alleviating stress is likely to be diminished (Thoits, 2011). Additionally, some studies have noted that in certain contexts, social support can become a source of pressure if individuals feel overwhelmed or have unmet expectations from those around them (Taylor, 2011; Bolger & Amarel, 2007).

While social support is generally considered capable of buffering the negative effects of loneliness on stress, this study revealed that social support did not significantly influence the moderation of this relationship (Taylor, 2011). This suggests that the mere presence of social support is not necessarily sufficient to reduce stress levels. The effectiveness of such support is heavily dependent on the quality of interpersonal relationships, the relevance of the type of support provided to the individual's needs, and the subjective perception of the support received (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Inadequate, contextually inappropriate,

or poorly timed support may fail to offer a protective effect against stress (Uchino, 2006). This finding diverges from several earlier studies asserting that high-quality social support enhances psychological resilience (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Therefore, it is possible that participants in this study—particularly highly educated housewives—felt that their social interactions did not sufficiently meet their intellectual or emotional needs, which may explain why social support did not function as a protective factor against stress in this context (Weiss, 1973).

In Indonesia, social support from both family and the community tend to be normative, with a strong emphasis on the mother's role as the primary caregiver for children (Idrus, 2019, as cited in Fajriyati, Lestari, & Hertinjung, 2023). Although extended families or community networks may serve as sources of social interaction and support, not all housewives perceive this support as sufficient to alleviate feelings of loneliness. Furthermore, in a culture still dominated by patriarchal values, women are often expected to suppress or conceal negative emotions to maintain household harmony. This expectation can become a barrier to accessing or seeking the support that they genuinely need (Zuhaena & Harsuti, 2021).

This reflects the broader cultural realities in Indonesia, where traditional gender roles continue to define women's responsibilities within the domestic sphere (Utomo, 2015). Despite women's increasing educational attainment, social norms still encourage many to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers after marriage. According to the findings of this study, most housewives choose not to work to focus more on family care, whether as a personal decision or due to pressure from their immediate environment, such as requests from spouses or expectations from parents or in-laws to fully assume domestic roles. This suggests that the decision not to work is often not entirely autonomous but is instead influenced by prevailing social values and expectations (Sahrawat, 2024). Under such conditions, housewives are at greater risk of experiencing loneliness due to perceived limitations in exploring their potential beyond domestic responsibilities, which can exacerbate stress, particularly when they feel a lack of control over their life choices.

Moreover, many women choose to leave their careers after marriage without fully considering the psychological consequences of this decision. While such choices may align with socially accepted norms, in the long run, disengagement from work or outside activities can limit access to more diverse support networks. Research shows that women who take on dual roles—as both workers and caregivers—tend to experience higher levels of psychological well-being, as they benefit from broader sources of support and greater opportunities for self-development (Allen, French, Dumani, & Shockley, 2015). Therefore, the decision not to work may contribute to increased risks of loneliness and stress, especially when women feel underappreciated or overwhelmed by monotonous domestic routines (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003).

The duration of marriage plays a significant role in influencing the levels of loneliness and stress among highly educated, unemployed housewives. In the early years of marriage—typically within the first three to five years—individuals are generally still adjusting to their new roles as wives and mothers, which often leads to stress due to role transitions and reduced social interactions (Super, 1980; Luhmann & Hawkley, 2016). Furthermore, the instability of the family unit during this period may exacerbate feelings of loneliness, particularly when the social support received does not adequately meet emotional needs (Neighbor 1985).

Conversely, housewives who have been married for more than six years tend to experience lower stress and loneliness. This can be attributed to their enhanced ability to develop more effective coping strategies and establish stronger social support networks (Antonucci et al., 2014; Neff & Karney, 2005). In Indonesian culture, the role of housewife is still highly valued, and women who have been married for a longer time are generally better able to adjust to social expectations and family demands (Taslim, Ninin, & Astuti, 2021). Thus, marital duration is a key factor in shaping the relationship between loneliness and stress. To mitigate these negative outcomes, interventions should focus on housewives in the early stages of marriage, such as forming supportive communities and providing early coping skills training.

The findings of this study indicate that levels of loneliness are not significantly influenced by variables such as the number of children, education level, place of residence, satisfaction with the housewife role, participation in community activities, frequency of communication with friends, desire to return to work, or proximity to the extended family. These results are consistent with previous research, which emphasized that loneliness is a highly subjective experience that cannot always be explained by objective demographic or social factors (Cacioppo and Cacioppo, 2018). Instead, loneliness is more strongly influenced by psychological aspects, such as individuals' perceptions of the quality of their social relationships and the degree of trust they place in others (Hawkley & Capitanio, 2015).

In relation to stress, this study revealed that most of the examined variables did not show significant effects, except for community involvement. This finding highlights the importance of social support gained through community engagement in reducing stress among highly educated housewives who are not employed. Active participation in community life has the potential to foster a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation, ultimately contributing to lower levels of loneliness and stress (Haslam, McMahon, Cruwys, Jetten, & Steffens, 2018). However, further research is needed to explore the specific types and quality of social interactions within communities that contribute to this effect. Elements such as emotional support and the presence of close interpersonal bonds among community members are also critical factors in determining the effectiveness of social engagement in alleviating stress and loneliness (Chen and Feeley, 2014).

These findings also suggest that the social relationships of the participants may be relatively superficial or lack depth. Although most participants reported having close friends and maintaining regular communication with peers, a low frequency of contact or limited engagement in social activities may result in a lack of meaningful interaction. This is consistent with the observation that participants actively involved in community groups tended to report lower stress levels, indicating that more intense social engagement may contribute to stress reduction (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010).

Furthermore, this study found significant differences in perceived social support based on the number of children and the place of residence. Housewives with more children tended to receive greater support from their spouses, family members, and the surrounding community. This aligns with previous research indicating that a greater number of children increases the likelihood of receiving support from relatives and peers (Taylor et al., 2000). Place of residence also influences access to social support, as individuals living in socially cohesive neighborhoods are more likely to receive assistance (Umberson & Montez, 2010). However, a high level of education or frequent communication with friends does not necessarily guarantee the availability of adequate social support (Antonucci et al., 2017).

A significant association was found between the number of children and the level of perceived social support, with mothers of more children generally reporting higher levels of social support. This may be due to the meaningful role children play in the lives of mothers and their contribution to emotional bonding in the family (Umberson et al., 2010). However, the analysis revealed that participants with only one child reported the highest average level of perceived social support, while those with three children reported the lowest average level. This discrepancy may be attributed to the overrepresentation of participants with one child in this study. Nevertheless, the group of mothers with three children exhibited greater variability in perceived support than the other groups. This is in line with the findings of Mariyanti et al. (2021), who noted that working mothers with more than three children tend to exhibit higher levels of optimism, viewing their children as a source of family support that contributes to decision-making and mindset development.

It is likely that a mother's psychological well-being is more strongly influenced by factors such as parenting style, the quality of marital relationship, and the extent of her social engagement outside the household (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). In certain cases, a greater number of children may increase psychological stress, particularly when mothers feel overwhelmed by increasingly complex caregiving responsibilities.

The findings also indicate that several demographic and social factors do not significantly affect loneliness and stress levels. This suggests that psychological aspects and more personalized environmental conditions may play a dominant role in influencing these outcomes (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). For instance, personality traits such as neuroticism may heighten an individual's vulnerability to loneliness and stress, even in the presence of external social support (Mund et al., 2020). Additionally, factors such as self-confidence and emotional regulation capabilities can be critical in determining the amount of stress an individual experiences (Hobfoll, Tirone, Holmgreen, & Gerhart, 2016).

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal a positive and significant relationship between loneliness and stress, supporting H1a. This means that the higher the level of loneliness experienced by an individual, the higher the level of stress they are likely to experience. This suggests that loneliness is a key risk factor for increased stress. Conversely, a negative relationship was found between social support and loneliness, indicating that individuals who receive higher levels of social support tend to experience lower levels of loneliness. However, social support was not found to have a significant effect on reducing stress, nor did it moderate the relationship between loneliness and stress, meaning that H2a was not supported.

The analysis also showed that loneliness accounts for only a small portion of the variation in stress, with many other factors influencing an individual's psychological condition. Nonetheless, feelings of isolation and lack of social connection can have detrimental effects on mental health. Furthermore, while theoretically, social support should act as a buffer against stress, the findings of this study suggest a relationship that contradicts the initial hypothesis. This indicates the possibility of other factors that could moderate or complicate the relationship between social support and stress, such as the quality of social relationships and personality factors. Thus, this study underscores the significant role of loneliness in exacerbating stress, while the role of social support in alleviating stress was not significant.

This study offers theoretical recommendations for future research to develop more comprehensive models by incorporating additional variables, employing longitudinal designs, and utilizing qualitative or mixed-methods approaches for a deeper understanding. This suggests the need to explore other potential mediating or moderating factors. On a practical level, this study recommends the development of community-based intervention programs, emotional regulation training, enhancement of social interaction quality, and engagement in productive activities to support the psychological well-being of highly educated housewives who are not employed.

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