

# The Resilience of Single Mothers with Special Needs Children in Supporting Their Education and Fulfilling Their Needs During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

A single mother dealt with complicated conditions, especially for children with special needs, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to large-scale social restrictions in Jakarta and its surroundings, many activities have changed, including learning and teaching. All educational activities are conducted online. Single mothers should consider fulfilling their children's needs when dealing with their children doing online schooling. The purpose of this study was to find out more about the resilience of a single mother with children with special needs in supporting their children's education during the Covid-19 pandemic. This qualitative research used a phenomenological study of four single mothers as children with special needs aged 15-22 years who struggle to raise them. This research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and indicates that single mothers have quite strong resilience because they can adapt to conditions, but on the other hand, they still need support from family, friends, and the environment to maintain their resilience behavior. The conclusion is that the pandemic condition has not changed the single mother's determination with special needs children in supporting their education. Support from family, friends, and the school is critical to strengthen the determination of single mothers in caring for their children.

*Keywords: Single mother, Resilience, Support system and psychological adjustment*

## 1. Background

The Covid-19 pandemic has spread in Indonesia and several countries around the world, which began at the end of 2019 (Putri, 2020). As the fourth most populous country globally, Indonesia certainly felt the impact of this pandemic (Putri, 2020). This pandemic has an extensive impact not only in big cities but also in small cities where they have to comply with protocols implemented by the government. Government regulations require maintaining distance and wearing masks, restrictions in crowded areas, and quarantine (Meilianna & Purba, 2020). These restrictions are also known as the Large-Scale Social Restriction (LSSR).

Due to the LSSR, some work areas are forced to work from home (Hertz Rossana, Mattes Jane, 2020), especially in social and economic fields (Putri, 2020). According to the Central Statistics Agency, this pandemic also increased the number of unemployed people in Indonesia; according to the Central Statistics Agency, 175,890 people were sent home in August 2020 in Jakarta. This figure has increased the number of jobless populations in Jakarta to a total of 572,780 people. The impact of this pandemic on workers in Indonesia is enormous. According to (Meilianna & Purba, 2020), the sectors affected are the tourism sector, wholesale and retail trade, accommodation and food, manufacturing, and also housing. These socio-economic changes have had a psychological impact on many families, especially from the mothers' side.

This situation is much more challenging for single mothers. A single mother is defined as a woman who has to live alone either because of divorce, death or unexpected pregnancy (Naz Iram, Fatima Khushnood, 2020). Apart from having to support herself, a single mother has to support her children. Single mothers must meet many needs, which causes them to work harder to meet family needs. Some of the needs include primary needs and children's education (Meilianna & Purba, 2020). The pandemic then compounds this problem as the country's economy worsens and health complications may arise.

As they have to face several complex problems, single mothers require some supports from friends and family (Grossman, Christie Campbell Hudson et al., 2009). (Christopher, 2012) describes that single mother always try to find work to support their children, especially in this complex situation. Single mothers are going to find work using the skills they have, even though it is a challenging responsibility.

During this pandemic, single mothers tend to have a higher level of stress because they have to earn a living and support their children to study well (Hertz Rossana, Mattes Jane, 2020); (Knoef & Van ours, 2016). The level of efficiency very much determines the consideration of a single mother in finding an overtime job to raise her children (Rahayu, 2017).

The phenomenon of single mothers struggling to support her family creates another problem, it's economic vulnerability. (Kramer et al., 2016) argued that single mothers tend to be in a state of poverty and graduate from lower levels of education compared to single fathers. An income level is a measuring tool for poverty because it causes difficulties in getting a better livelihood, especially for a single mother (Chi et al., 2017).

The struggle of single mothers become even more severe if she has children with special needs and experienced high levels of stress. Children with special needs need more attention because they are susceptible to diseases. Besides that, other basic needs such as attention to diet and clothing hygiene become many responsibilities that they must take on (Schilling et al., 2016).

## **2. Purpose**

In this COVID-19 pandemic, people are facing challenges in the social and economic sectors. Jakarta, as the economic center in Indonesia, experienced significant changes, such as several economic activities that must be closed, such as restaurants, malls, schools, courses, shop and offices.

People with different statuses are all affected by the Covid-19 situation, including individual mothers, as before the pandemic, they had to struggle to live alone to raise their children. However, with this pandemic, the life of single mothers is more complicated than it already is. In addition, the children have to experience changes in terms of learning. All the learning process should be done at home. Single mothers who should have time to work with this condition must allocate additional time to guide their children to study at home.

From the explanation above, this research wishes to examine further the contribution of single mothers with children with special needs in supporting education and meeting needs in the COVID-19 pandemic terms.

## **3. Literature**

The Covid-19 plague has broken out since the end of 2019 and claimed lives. This situation is a matter of concern for human lives worldwide (Cetin et al., 2020). Several ways have been taken to reduce this pandemic also by controlling social distancing and the health protocol. Nevertheless, this procedure creates both physical and psychological problems in the communities. Psychological problems caused by quarantine are feelings of hopelessness and depression (Jaspal et al., 2020). There are regulations from the government to carry out social restrictions that require all citizens to self-isolate independently. If the duration of this demand to isolate themselves in the long term, it will have a destructive impact, namely depression, sadness, feelings of anxiety, and insomnia. They also experienced financial problems (Al Sulais et al., 2020); (Grover et al., 2020)

In order to live through the pandemic, people must be more creative in earning income and utilizing technology to maintain health and safety (Meilianna & Purba, 2020). This pandemic caused an increase in poverty in many countries (Krieger et al., 2020), including Jakarta and the surrounding. Poverty also significantly affects depression and reduces health among young and old (Chi et al., 2017). Poverty is divided into two: 1. Absolute poverty where poverty is experienced by a person when it is challenging to get the source of nutrition needed to support his life. 2. Relative poverty is caused by the unreachable desire to achieve a standard of living (Wardaya et al., 2018). Poverty is also associated with a high population growth rate with low employment opportunities in the community (Wardaya et al., 2018). This condition causes many job sectors misplaced and the absence of new jobs that emerge. Research shows that women have also been adversely affected by the conditions of the Covid-19 outbreak, especially single mothers

and contract workers, where there has been an increase in both physical and psychological violence coupled with the increased living needs of family members.

The problem of hardship that occurs worsens the mental condition of a mother, which ultimately affects the growth and development of her child (Beeber et al., 2008). An excellent mental condition for a mother is indispensable because it will affect the parenting patterns of her children. Low-income families tend to have problems with children's behaviour and emotions, affecting the relationship between family members and their mental health (Flouri & Midouhas, 2016), especially between mother and child. The degree of health among the poor tends to be very low, while health and welfare factors should be balanced (Chi et al., 2017).

Based on research, the number of marriages that last a lifetime in America continues to decline, contributing directly to social problems, poverty, delinquency, violence, substance abuse, a decline in academic standards, and environmental and community erosion. Likewise, a situation in Indonesia, in agreement with the Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of single mums is more significant than single fathers. Research has shown that single mothers experience higher stress levels due to lower income and social and psychological support. This condition brings single mothers to the poverty situation even more (Briggs et al., 2015). Sometimes, the marriage rope termination is considered a solution for mother and child, especially if there is violence. The problem of poverty also adds to the problem of single mothers, especially in Jakarta and surrounding areas, due to the emergence of the phenomenon of workers being laid off (Jakarta's Central Statistics Agency). A single mother feels more depression and anxiety than a mother from a complete family of the same age. They also endure fear, loneliness and insecurity (Long et al., 2019); (Naz Iram, Fatima Khushnood, 2020). The needs of a single mother and her children will only be satisfied if she can work at least 30 hours/week, considering it is difficult to do because of her children's demands (Knoef & Van ours, 2016). Single mothers struggle with psychological issues in the workplace because of adapting to the new environment (Naz Iram, Fatima Khushnood, 2020).

Families with only one parent tend to have a lower living standard and income. Single-parent families have lower income levels and living standard (Brown, 2010). The problem of single parents is one of the causes of high levels of frustration (Kramer et al., 2016), especially if you have to raise teenagers. A mother's depression affects her child's poor cognitive outcomes (Wu et al., 2019).

Many single mothers choose to work as part-time workers and "casual work". The conditions require single mothers and their children to move to another location, adapt to a new environment, and look for a job (McKenzie et al., 2019). Single mothers tend to be more involved in controlling the behaviour of their children. Compared to a father, although sometimes low economic status is often associated with single mother status and negative parenting patterns (Daryanani et al., 2016). However, a mother will feel satisfied if their children can live well so that they will be able to adapt to their

environment as in research conducted by (Lamela et al., 2017) that life satisfaction has a significant positive relationship to psychological adjustment.

In addition to considering her life's needs, a single mother also has to think about the needs of her children (Meilianna & Purba, 2020) because they sense a big responsibility. They also want to have a job to improve their lives and their children (Duffy, 2015). Raising children is difficult even in the complete family, especially since there is no government support in raising children. The struggles of single mothers have also worsened along with the outbreak of the pandemic.

Pandemic conditions lead single mothers to stay at home because their children have to study at home and complicate them to work outside the house (Hertz Rossana, Mattes Jane, 2020). However, this does not discourage the enthusiasm of a single mother to support her child's education because mothers who are able to withstand the pressures of life and high stress can affect parenting for their children (Luthar et al., 2000). The resilience of single mothers helps them to educate and raise their children.

Single mothers tended to have higher standards in educating their children and involved more in school than single fathers because they believe education could help them from affliction (Kramer et al., 2016). Parent's engagement in the children's studying activity has a positive effect on educational progress. Parental involvement in children's learning at school has a positive impact on educational progress. Unfortunately, it can have a long-term stressful impact on mothers and children, especially single parents (Berryhill, 2018). Many studies showed that some alone mothers tend to consume less moment with their children than married mothers.

The human capital theory discusses education as a factor that could be increase income and productivity. This theory is due to skill, knowledge, and ability to analyze problems (Kramer et al., 2016).

Children from breakup families have an emotional problem condition compared to average families and academic problems because of the stormy relationship between child and parent. Difficulties for mothers in interacting with their children not only directed problems with the mother herself. Children sometimes judge their mothers if they often compare their children with the others, especially in academics (Burge & Hammen, 1991). Many studies show that children from incomplete families are bound to score low academically in literacy and mathematics. (Berryhill, 2018). Most studies suggest a positive relationship between parental involvement and student grades (Fan & Chen, 2001).

Single mothers felt stress, specifically during the Covid-19 outbreak, because they deal with heavy burdens due to low income. This position also causes a decrease in self-confidence in themselves (Naz Iram, Fatima Khushnood, 2020). The inability to speak languages can also result in the mother's lack of confidence in asking questions and seeking necessary information about health for her children. Mothers are the centre of

caregivers for their children and feel more concerned about their child's condition than before the pandemic broke out (Hertz Rossana, Mattes Jane, 2020).

#### **4. Method**

This research is using a qualitative approach. According to Fathurahman (2011), research approaching a phenomenon-oriented or natural should be directed with a qualitative study. In qualitative research, it will be based on literature as a basis for thinking. This study used phenomenological theory. Phenomenology is a theory that describes a phenomenon that emphasizes the method of understanding that shows behaviour in society.

This study investigates the state of the Covid-19 pandemic, which affects single mothers are striving for their children. It also discussed the desire of single mothers to keep trying for their children's education and health, both physically and mentally. In qualitative research, data collection, according to Suwartono (2014), is an activity in collecting, unifying, retrieving data used for research. Data collection was carried out using purposive sampling because the informants were considered the ones who best understood the desired situation in the study. According to Yin (2011), purposive sampling was also able to produce data according to the research topic because it was the most relevant and abundant.

This study will obtain primary data, which conducts the interviews with four single mothers who have special needs children. They have already been a single mother for more than two years without a partner and have one or more children. After combining some of the data obtained, the basics of substantive procedures will be carried out, which according to Yin (2011), the steps are as follows: sorting, coding, combining and recombining text sequences. According to Given (2008), a study is critical because the higher the validity and reliability of research, the more likely it is to predict future research. Validity and reliability in a qualitative study are meant to repeat the analysis, conduct the contradictions, triangulate the methodology by confirming the data, and look for other examples until it is summarized to the conclusions. This study also has several limitations where the data collection was only carried out on a few single mothers who struggled to live during the Covid-19 Pandemic and lived in the Jakarta area.

#### **5. Results and discussion**

##### **5.1 Support system**

Single moms who have children with disabilities will feel secure if they receive positive social assistance from the disability service system, their families and communities around them (Kuhn et al., 2017). The attention of the relatives of Mrs Nana, a single mother of two children, is a crucial thing. For instance, the financial sector and also things that related to her children. She feels that she cannot do anything without her family support. From a communication perspective, social support is a form of support in psychology and emotional aspects to feel supported, valued, and loved.

Mrs Shinta, a single mother with two children whose second child, Niko, has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), also feels the importance of support from her extended family because they could understand Niko's condition. Mrs Shinta's family assists daily necessities and provides a comfortable place to live for Mrs Sinta and her children. Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) need care and support from their closest people for a lifetime due to their lack of survival skills. People with ASD often show tantrums and disobedience in social interactions (Shepherd et al., 2020). This attitude has appeared in Niko's daily activities. The unstable condition of a child who has ASD sometimes drains a lot of energy and mind, so family support is needed:

*"Often madness, often angry, since he was baby, he was not developing normally from 5-6 months. When he was a year or two, he often banged his head and many things that children with Autism commonly do. The point is, as I can say, it is very tough to handle ..... A friend suggested if Niko stayed in the Church, which was in the Sewan, and I decided to ask Niko to stay there. Honestly, I only expected Niko to spent time during the Eid Holiday. Maybe he spent time with prayed, joined worship, and many good things and thank God, the initial goal was only a month or two months, but he took four months. After four months, it was an extraordinary result. He never gets angry, and we can communicate with each other very well."*

Individuals have better mental health if they receive psychological and physical support from friends, the environment and family members. A single mother will also feel helped by the support from the environment as experienced by Mrs Andi Nur Jani, a single mother who has a retarded child who is 22 years old and has heart issue. When Mrs Andi did not have any money to buy medicine for her daughter, there was a doctor who helped:

*"Fortunately, we met a good doctor. Once he said to me: Mam, if you don't have any money, please let us know, and don't let your child doesn't take her medicine, because it's very important. I was too embarrassed, I tried not to beg anyone, but the doctor kept telling me that he would help heal my daughter".*

Single mothers' health is supported by various things such as spiritual, children, family, co-workers, and friends. Mrs Sinta has anxiety and fear related to Nico's poor health due to a leaky heart condition. Mrs Sinta felt empowered by God in the face of this situation and asked Nico to pray when he felt sick. The beliefs could strengthen Mrs Sinta's mentality in dealing with problems.

## **5.2 Resilience**

The life of single mothers with special needs children is complicated, coupled with the Covid-19 pandemic conditions, which require every student to study at home with parental supervision. This situation causes the strength of single mothers to become stronger, so resilience is needed. Resilience is the answer to various kinds of problems faced by parents: child care and financial problems, but this could be overcome with social supports (Young et al., 2019). With strong resilience, Mrs Nana, a mother with a child who is deaf (Jeni) endures the countless challenges that come her

way. Whereas she finds it challenging to help Jeni's education with her hearing impairment which makes her difficult to hear the lessons conveyed by the online learning:

"Sometimes I teach her, but she doesn't understand. She said she didn't follow the lesson. Nevertheless, I tried to encourage her every day from morning until the class dismissal."

Education and life in a pandemic period are also challenging to fulfil the needs of single mothers and their children, as was felt by Mrs Andi Nur Jani (51 years) because of her obligations to raise Nur with a mentally challenged condition. Since the Large-Scale Social restriction was implemented in Jakarta, Mrs Nur can no longer sell her products at the house's night market, one of her income sources. However, this issue did not cause Mrs Nur to give up to found another job. Individuals can adapt to their life difficulties, rapid recovery, produce resilience, and sustain (Rutten et al., 2013).

Resilience also defined as a person's ability to withstand or recover quickly from a situation that he or she thinks is difficult (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Single mothers will continue to survive for the sake of their children, as felt by Mrs Alang even though she has to raise three children by herself, including her second child Philips who has special needs:

"Frankly, I am a hard folk. I think if I don't struggle, my family will not survive like this. Maybe I am obstinate so that I can survive until today, I am the one who built this family from the beginning."

According to Bonnano and Mancini (2008) in (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013) everyone must experience traumatic problems in their life. Some of them are able to survive. Mrs Alang was worried when her husband died at the end of 2019, but this incident did not make her discouraged with all the difficulties.

### **5.3 Psychological adjustment**

In various studies, it has been shown that psychological adjustment is closely related to individual self-confidence and adjustment to conditions in the environment and is not controlled by feelings of depression and prolonged helplessness (Nezlek, 2001). Single mothers who have to fulfil the needs and education of their children, especially those with special needs, must control their stress and depression. Although it was challenging for Mrs Andi Nur Jani to support herself and also her special needs daughter, she was able to overcome her difficulties with patience:

"If you say it is difficult, well, it must be difficult, but I just do it. There are only two of us. I work not only for myself, but I have to take care of my daughter. Everything is difficult, as a single mother, it must be difficult, but well, if I'm impatient, it must be



stress, so I just do it, the important things that we are healthy and also have a little bit money for living."

Some single mothers don't want to be controlled by prolonged depression. For Mrs Nana, although she felt it was challenging to assist Jeni to study during this pandemic. Due to her daughter's limited condition, but did not diminish her intention to accompany her child to study. Mrs Nana did not hesitate to ask for any help from teachers at school to provide learning assistance.

Mrs Nana divorced two years ago, and it must have also been caused a high burden. As described by (Lamela et al., 2017), a divorced person requires a very significant adaptation process in adults, requiring high psychological adjustment. However, with the support of her family, this concern did not provoke Mrs Nana to become discouraged.

Psychological adjustment is determined by the level of a person's ability to overcome life's challenges, negotiate and manage them. Successful psychological adjustments are indicated by a person's success in coping with his emotions. Due to the condition of Nico, someone with autism and has an unpredictable temperament, Mrs Shinta, his mom, can manage her emotions in raising Nico:

"..... sometimes he cries, and in the next minute, suddenly, it changes. I admit I need to be more patient, more extra patient, I have to understand, not all of the other people can understand, sometimes he keeps arguing with his sister."

Mrs Sinta also feels tough in raising her children because of God's strength and also the support from her best friend and family.

<b>Table 1</b>		
<b>Correlated with Support System</b>		
<b>No</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
1	Mrs Andi Nur Jani	When Mrs Andi's child had heart surgery, she was helped by the doctors at the hospital and donors who helped alleviate her difficulties buying medicines. Mrs Andi has received much assistance from the school regarding her daughter's education, both from waiving school fees and the academic side.
2	Mrs Nana	Since separating from her husband, Mrs Nana has raised and educates her two children by herself. She felt significantly helped by the extended family, who care for the needs of her children. Jeni's education is also very dependent on the school, which understands the difficulties she is experiencing

3	Mrs Shinta	Nico, the son of Mrs Shinta, has autism spectrum disorder, which often changes emotions. Support from the family by providing a proper place to live for Mrs Shinta, Nico, and her daughter is valuable because Nico challenges adapting to a new environment.
4	Mrs Alang	Mrs Alang is a woman with a strong personality. The attention of her younger siblings and parents, who live far outside the island, helped her to be more determined in raising her three children, especially Philips, her second child, who has a mentally challenged condition.

<b>Table 2</b>		
<b>Correlated with Resilience</b>		
<b>No</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
1	Mrs Andi Nur Jani	Mrs Andi earns income as a sewer and selling products at night markets. If there is no income on that day, she will try the next day. Not only trying to survive, but she is also very passionate or faithful in accompanying her daughter to study online learning.
2	Mrs Nana	Mrs Nana often has difficulty accompanying Jeni to study online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Once Jeni wanted to stop studying, her mother kept looking for other options to make Jeni motivated.
3	Mrs Shinta	Nico, who has autism spectrum disorder, often experiences fluctuating emotions. Mrs Shinta never gives up on looking after Nico. The Church, family, and good friends have become her support system in surviving and raising her child.
4	Mrs Alang	As a single mother, Mrs Alang experiences many difficulties and obstacles in earning a living and looking after her three children. Every time Mrs Alang feels hopeless, she always thinks of her children, and she feels she has to get back up for the sake of her child, especially Philips, who has special needs.

Table 3		
Correlated with Psychological Adjustment		
No	Participant	Explanation
1	Mrs Andi Nur Jani	Mrs Andi always accepts her conditions. In addition to earning a living, she also struggles to follow her child's lessons, so her daughter can get the education well.
2	Mrs Nana	Jeni (Mrs Nana's first daughter) is a deaf teenager who is prone to fluctuating moods. Even though Jeni once felt like quitting school due to difficulty concentrating, Mrs Nana tried to adapt and think of a way out. With the help of teachers and school principals, finally, Jeni is able to study well.
3	Mrs Shinta	Mrs Shinta always gives her life to God. Every struggle she deals with in her living life, she continuously adapts well. She will think of the best solution for Nico, who has autism spectrum disorder and her first daughter. Her extended family and friends also support her to raise her children, so she feels confident to solve the problems.
4	Mrs Alang	At the beginning of the pandemic, Mrs Alang once lost her livelihood, but she was able to control her stress and depression. She did not want to continue sinking into despair and tried to find a way out for the sake of her children.

## 6. Conclusion

The condition of the Covid-19 pandemic that occurred since the beginning of 2020 has changed many perspectives, habits and activities. However, this doesn't make single mothers give up supporting their kid's education and fulfilling their needs. This situation is because of the support from the families and the educational institutions.

The pandemic caused a deep recession for many people. This problem also adds a burden to Mrs Andi Nur Jani, Mrs Nana, Mrs Shinta and Mrs Alang. However, they went through all the problems. They show the resilience to survive for the sake of their children.

Children with special needs tend to have volatile emotions. The role of a mother is essential in assisting them to learn and to follow the school curriculum. Mothers are also willing to become teachers at home. Moreover, teachers' support in schools is also a constructive help for single mothers in distance teaching.

Single mothers will be able to adapt to some problems in their life with the support of their family, friends and the environment.

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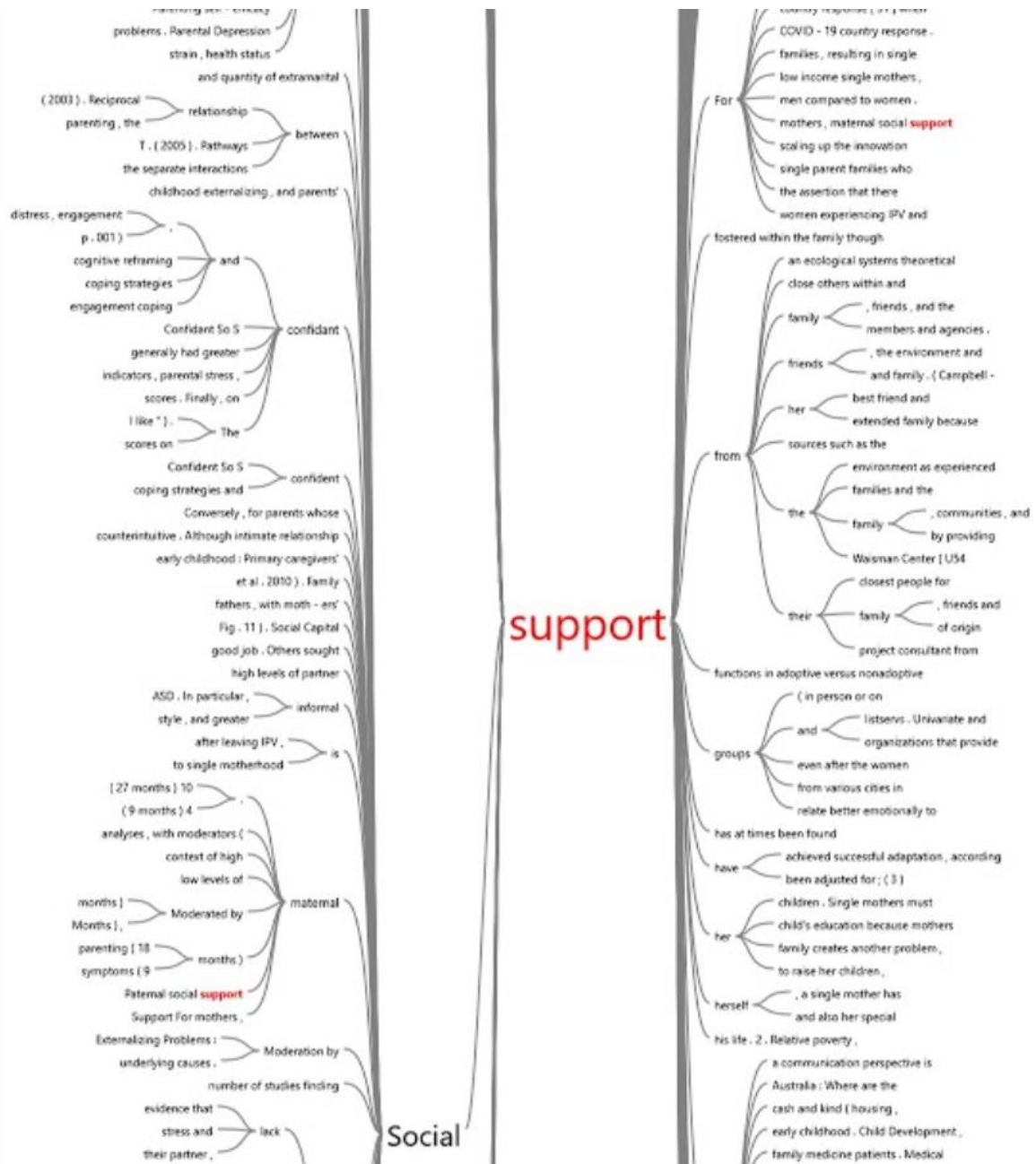


Figure 1: Nvivo Analysis of Support System

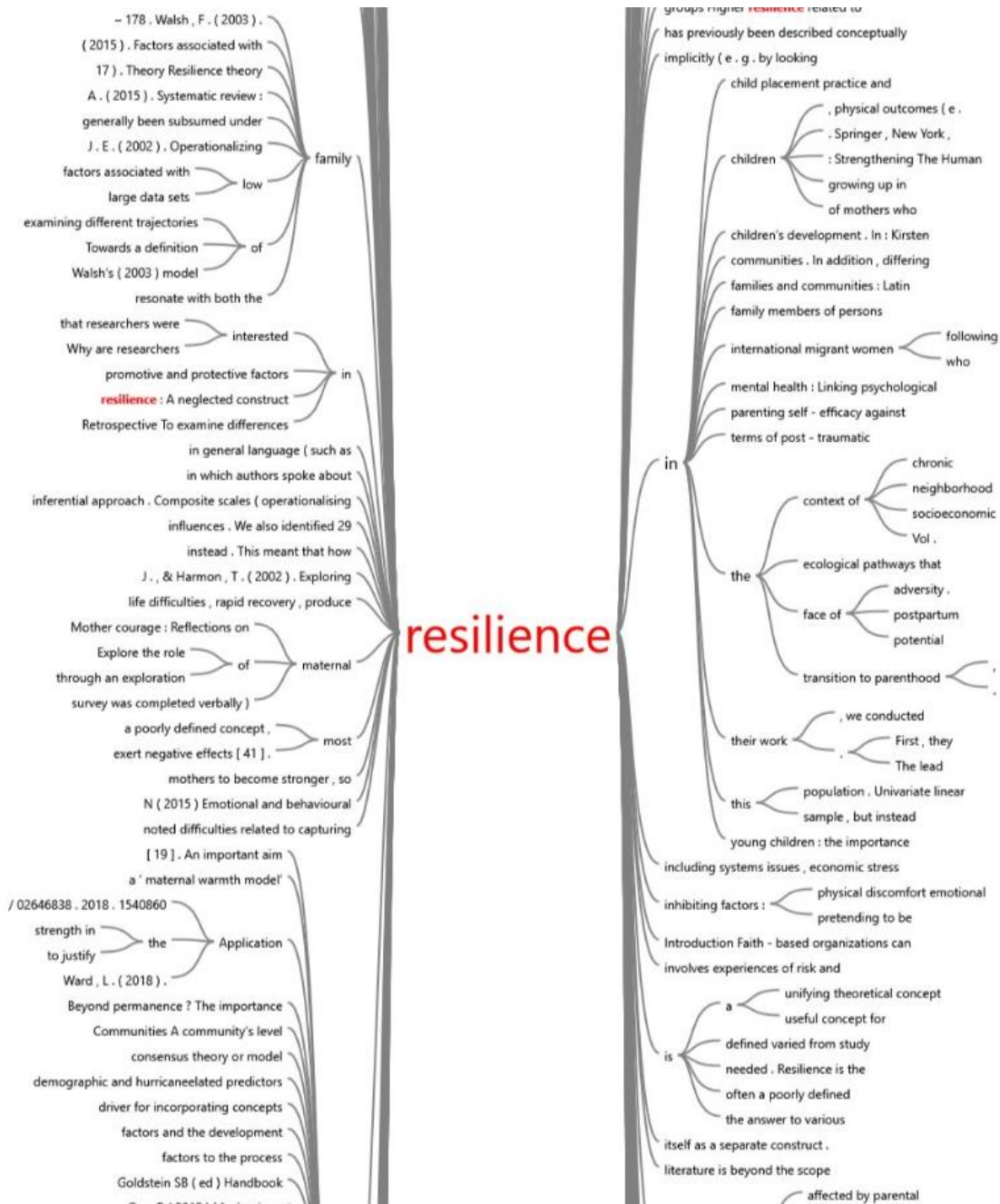


Figure 2: Nvivo Analysis of Resilience



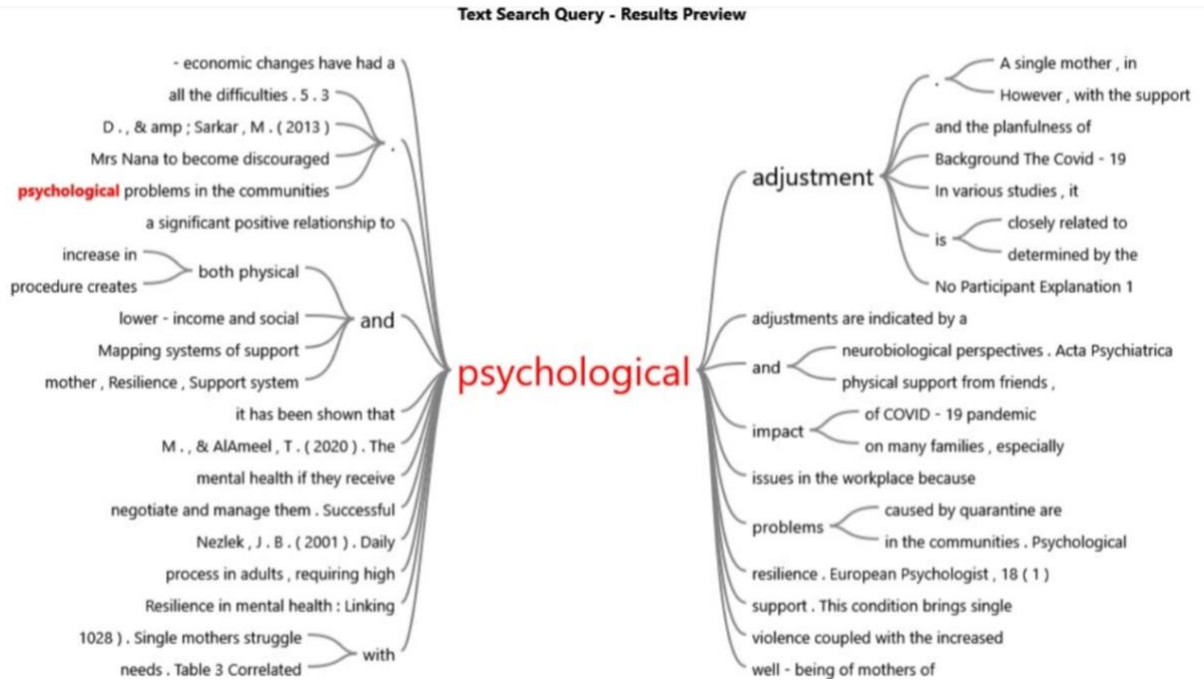


Figure 3: Nvivo Analysis of Psychological Adjustment