

The Gap Between Stay-At-Home Moms and Working Moms towards Burnout

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i3/19227>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i3/19227

Published Date: 12 March 2024

Abstract

Burnout is the most common occurrence among mothers. It has become a serious issue that needs to be concerned by many peoples around the world. Burnout is recognized as a work-related disorder by the World Health Organization (WHO) although it does not fall within the category of disease. However, there is a continuous argument in society in regard to burnout among stay-at-home moms and working moms. Some individuals argue that stay-at-home moms are more depressed and stressed than working moms. Conversely, there are also a few people who believe that working moms are worse than stay-at-home moms in terms of burnout. Thus, this paper aims to study the gap between stay-at-home moms and working moms toward burnout. This study was carried out in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan with a proposed sample size of 354 respondents among mothers. The data obtained from this study was gathered using a set of questionnaires which consist of several factors of burnout and the respondent has answer the same set of questionnaires. The findings from this study were demonstrate several factors that contribute to burnout among stay-at-home moms and working moms. The burnout among them also categorised as the same level which the comparison of value among factors is small.

Keywords: Burnout, Stay-At-Home Moms, Working Moms, Gap, Factors of Burnout, Stress, Depression, Exhaustion

Introduction

Background of Study

Nowadays, burnout is seen as a silent crisis in global health and is also wellrecognized, but rarely discussed or researched (Pai, 2020). There is no doubt that everyone has different levels of burnout according to their daily activities itself. However, naturally, burnout is also experienced by mothers either for who are working or stay-at-home. Some working mothers

need to make sure their family's needs are taken care of before they go out for work such as taking care of children, preparing the dishes, and doing other household chores.

Poduval & Poduval (2009) say that working women frequently put their health last because they are so driven to succeed at work and at home. While stay-at-home mothers usually focus more on household chores and arguably like working 24 hours a day at home. According to Punam & Sharma (2017), activities that kept women at home were more assigned to them, like help in household-level farming, spinning, and weaving, family care, etc. In addition, one of the global disasters has been parent burnout, particularly among mothers (Lakshmin, 2021). The three symptoms of weariness, futility and difficulties maintaining relationships make up the clinical definition of burnout. While in Malaysia, the percentage of working parents who had emotional parental burnout, especially during the Movement Control Order (MCO) was 84.8%, which is a level at which we should raise an alarm and offer assistance before things worsen (Manja et al., 2020). Hence, the study is conducted to identify the gap between stay-at-home moms and working moms toward burnout.

Statement of Problem

Mothers' burnout is a problem that is largely overlooked in Malaysia. According to the preliminary study, there have only been a few studies on burnout issues, and the majority of them have only addressed worker burnout. A significant statistic from the Employee Wellness Report (2022) states that 58% of workers experience burnout at work and that those who experience burnout are 9% more likely to believe that their productivity has declined. However, apart from the workers, there is no doubt that mothers are also at risk of burnout since some of the mothers are also working and the rest are stay-at-home mothers. Given that both groups of mothers have quite different obligations and responsibilities as mothers, each category of mothers has specific difficulties.

Working mothers frequently struggle to balance their obligations as both parents and employees (Kadale et al., 2018). This has often required women to leave their careers to raise their children or at the very least to work fewer hours so they may stay at home with their children (Nguwi, 2022). In addition, before leaving for work, a working mother must take care of her household and children, such as by getting their child ready for school, doing the dishes, cleaning the house, etc. Different from stay-at-home mothers, some people have a viewpoint that staying home and raising children is a copout for women to just sit home and do nothing. The reality is that stay-at-home mothers have an endless list of responsibilities since they are never off the job and never get to go home. According to Philpott (2019), moms who stay at home are always on duty, have no holidays, no sick days, and are prone to occasional bouts of burnout. This is due to the fact that they spend almost all of their free time at home cleaning, cooking, washing clothing, raising children, etc. It is obvious that both mothers are going through a difficult time and are overburdened with responsibilities, which is what causes burnout. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the level and the gap of burnout among stay-at-home mothers and working mothers.

Specifically, this study is done to answer the following research questions

Research Question 1- What is the level of burnout among stay-at-home moms and working moms?

Research Question 2- What is the gap analysis between stay-at-home moms and working moms toward burnout?

Literature Review

Definition of Burnout

Christina Maslach began studying and defining burnout in the mid-1970s and developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)-Human Services Survey (HSS)11, which is now regarded as the gold standard assessment. Burnout is defined by the MBI as a high score (27 or more points) on emotional exhaustion (EE), a high score (13 or more points) on depersonalization (DP), and a low score (31 or fewer points) on personal accomplishment (PA) among professionals who serve people in need. Similarly, based on a recent study conducted by Costa & Pinto (2017), burnout has been identified as one of the factors having a negative impact on physical and mental well-being.

It also refers to a degree of physical and mental exhaustion, as well as a lack of energy to do day-to-day duties. Another study by Hewitt et al (2020) indicated that burnout is a multidimensional illness caused by weariness, interpersonal disengagement or cynicism toward one's position, and a sense of decreasing professional efficacy, all of which are caused by long-term workplace stress. Here, we concluded that burnout is always referred to as emotional exhaustion by many researchers as it gives a great impact on mental.

Meanwhile, in terms of parental burnout, Chen et al (2021) argued that it is a state when people experience tiredness in their parental position, have a low sense of competence and accomplishment, and demonstrate a lack of emotional attachment with their children. From our viewpoint, we believe that lack of emotional support from people surrounding us can be the main factor that leads to a low sense of competence and accomplishment which will automatically result in burnout.

Burnout Among Stay-At-Home Moms

According to Berg (2022), stay-at-home-mom (SAHM) burnout refers to a state of being exhausted by this extremely difficult and often isolated role for people who are full-time carers of the household and family. Mothers are regarded to be more vulnerable to stress because they are often the primary caretakers in the family. SAHM burnout, on the other hand, can be more difficult to detect due to misconceptions that these women have more time and less stress. Some people also view the position and role of stay-at-home moms as easier than those with additional obligations like career mothers.

Generally, stay-at-home moms not only perform the majority of childcare, but they often do more errands, housework, and repairs by default because they are the ones who are at home. When duties build up, the spouse sometimes doesn't understand why (Black, 2022). A few symptoms of SAHM burnout that are often identified are depression, insomnia, self-doubt, loneliness, and mom rage. However, mom rage varies from normal sorts of anger in that it feels like the anger has gone too far. Carolyn Wagner (2022) explains it as anger so extraordinary that it doesn't feel like it should even be termed "anger". Suarez-Angelino (2021) indicates that mom rage can lead to unpleasant experiences for both children and their parents due to feelings of guilt, resentment, anxiety, and sadness. Children may develop poor coping mechanisms for their own major emotions and resort to using anger and rage to express them in the future.

In addition, many stay-at-home moms may experience feelings of isolation and loneliness. It is because their children are the only people they see or talk to all day, which does not lend itself to the same types of conversations they might have with other adults (Laurence, 2022). We believe that this kind of feeling can be the main factor that leads to burnout among stay-at-home moms. Orlesa Pool, a therapist focused specifically on

motherhood said that when a stay-at-home mom feels burned out, they may have difficulty getting out of bed in the morning, lose patience with her children or spouse, become angry or cry for apparently no reason, or be easily provoked. Moreover, according to the Parental Burnout Assessment developed by Roskam and Mikolajczak in 2018, stay-at-home moms with young children are more physically exhausted, whereas those with adolescents or teenagers may experience emotional weariness as a result of disagreements with their children. This is due to the changes in the kid's behaviour over time. Therefore, it can be said that burnout among stay-at-home moms is not only due to their job scope and the nature of the task but also the behaviour and attitude of the children which affected them physically and emotionally. Burned-out parents which include stay-at-home moms prefer to detach themselves for a while from their children in order to conserve energy (Abramson, 2021).

Meanwhile, Nattress (2022) indicated that childcare would be a highly effective cure for burnout, but that is the root of the problem for many stay-at-home moms. It is because they rarely use outsourced childcare, whether due to budgetary constraints or because they believe they don't 'deserve' childcare centres because they are not providing an income for the family. Based on Motherly's 2022 State of Motherhood Survey Report, stay-at-home moms in the millennial and Gen Z generations are more exhausted than ever, and stay-at-home moms reported higher levels of burnout than working moms. From the total of 17,000 respondents, 55% of stay-at-home moms claimed to be "always" or "frequently" exhausted, a far higher number than their working moms. We agree with the fact that millennials and Gen Z's stay-at-home moms are experiencing more burnout levels. This is because their kids who are now in Generation Alpha (early 2010s until mid-2020s) are acting and behaving differently if compared to kids in the older generation. They are more aggressive and violent. According to Willard (2022), young children or preschool-aged children may exhibit aggressive behaviour as they are more likely to convey their demands physically before they can express them orally.

Burnout Among Working Moms

Based on 2020 data from Maven and Great Place to Work, 9.8 million working mothers reported feeling burned out in the United States. The data demonstrated that almost 30% more than working fathers, with Black, Asian, and Latina mothers having greater percentages. In addition, Dr Jaqueline Kerr, a burnout expert, had also listed four persistent stressors that contribute to Working Mom Burnout which are parenting burnout, occupational burnout, barrier burnout and crisis fatigue. In terms of parenting burnout, Kerr stated that women have historically performed a disproportionate amount of unpaid labour at home and it starts from the beginning, especially if the mother takes time off from work to be with the infant but the father does not. Based on the Women in the Workplace Report (2021), the "burnout gap" between men and women has roughly doubled and steadily increase since 2020. Despite the workplace tasks that need to be completed by mothers, they also need to manage everything that happens among the family members including the medical appointment, school and even ironing the cloth for their husbands. It is a very rare event to see the father does the same amount of house chores as the mother does.

Next, work and family are the two most important aspects of an employee's life, especially for working mothers with children (Gayathri & Sajeethkumar, 2019). Meanwhile, according to Chesak et al (2020), women experience workplace stress and burnout for varying reasons than males. Working women may experience burnout as a result of having to match cultural expectations for non-work-related duties, as well as discrimination and hurdles to

their unrestricted professional development. Based on a study conducted by Beauregard et al (2018), moms are also more susceptible to occupational burnout since they are less likely to be promoted, resulting in less autonomy and greater frustration. This is due to the failure of a company to recognise the special abilities that mothers have to offer and typically, female workplaces have higher levels of routine, poorer engagement in the organization, and higher demands, as well as greater visibility to critics.

Furthermore, when a woman becomes a mother, people will assume that her new commitment to her family makes her less committed to her profession. These artificial barriers make it difficult for these mothers to expand and develop their careers. In some situations, many working women claim they conceal the fact that they have children at home for fear of ruining their employment (Fairchild, 2020). Conversely, a father in the same situation is thought to be more committed to his job since he is now also committed to his family. Consequently, it has resulted in two different assumptions and this situation is known as barrier burnout.

According to Harvard's Gender Action Portal, mothers are viewed as being 12% less committed to their careers and 10% less skilled than childless women. With that, the employer will be urged to begin at much lower earnings than childless women, childless males, and fathers. Last but not least, the persistent stressor that contributes to burnout among working moms is crisis fatigue which is referring to sending kids into a scary world. 13 Nowadays, the pandemic of COVID-19 has caused moms to worry about the health of their children. It is never been easy to send children off into the world. But it's been stressful since March 2020 when moms need to wait to learn how the pandemic would affect children, wait for them to acquire immunisations, and wait to see what long-term implications a COVID-19 infection may have on their developing bodies. According to Harun & Radhi (2022), about 580,000 children aged 18 and younger have been infected with Covid-19. Meanwhile, 269,773 of the total involved children aged 5 to 11 (Khairy Jamaluddin, 2022). Although Dr Jaqueline Kerr introduced four persistent stressors that lead to burnout among working moms, we believe that parenting burnout and crisis fatigue are also affecting stay-at-home moms. It is because stay-at-home moms are also facing the same problems and challenges related to their spouses and the pandemic of COVID-19.

Moreover, women who are under the most pressure and stress are those that commit themselves to high professional and personal standards as mothers (Lacy, 2021). This kind of mother has a very high level of competitiveness to be good in everything that she is involved in. Therefore, as they hate failing in some tasks, they will always use their full energy in doing something. Consequently, it can lead to burnout if maximum energy is used every single day.

Past Studies

The Gap Between Stay-At-Home Moms and Working Moms Toward Burnout

As discussed above regarding burnout among stay-at-home moms and working moms, theoretically, it can be seen that burnout among working moms comes from various and numerous perspectives as compared to stay-at-home moms. This is due to burnout among working moms that can be resulted from the tension in the workplace as well as at home. Additionally, burnout risk in the workplace is high because it can come from different angles and situations whether from the employer or the colleagues. Sometimes, the employer can be hard to please and they also need to face a variety of colleagues' behaviour.

According to Ngow and Wan (2022), despite the encouraging progress among Malaysian working mothers, they frequently find the workplace hostile. In a 2020 survey, more than half

of women stated they had faced workplace discrimination, such as being asked to do more work than men for the same job description. However, we believe that it is still depending on the environment of the company itself on how they treat each other. Meanwhile, burnout caused by staying at home can also happen among working moms as they are still the ones who manage the household besides focusing on their careers. Working moms also face the same challenges that relate to their children and spouse. Although burnout among working moms is caused by various situations, it cannot be said that there is a low risk of burnout among stay-at-home moms. The only different thing is that stay-at-home moms are more exposed to loneliness as they spend most of their time at home alone while their husband is out at work and of course, the children are going to school in the daytime. In some situations, there are some people who get their energy from socialising and interacting with others and this usually happens among extroverted people (Hull, 2022).

Consequently, stay-at-home moms have no one that they can talk to if they wanted to share the burden with other people. According to Black (2022), not only is there a lot to do, but it's often the same activities over and over again, making one day feel practically identical to the next without a break. There is also no distraction from work. Sometimes, people who cannot do jobs in a routine will easily feel stressed. Hence, the burnout gap between stay-at-home moms and working moms is a bit difficult to be determined as each of them has their own conditions and situations that lead to burnout. In addition, among the stay-at-home moms and working moms, there must be few mothers who are identified as single parents as they no longer live with their partner. This kind of status increases the risk of becoming burnout.

According to Sartor et al (2023), risk factors and insufficient resources can assist to explain why single mothers face more stress. Childhood behavioural difficulties, more specifically chronic disorders or disabilities of the kid, are one of these risk factors, which frequently create significant demands on the parents. In relation to behavioural issues in children, the number and age of children can also have an impact on maternal stress. The greater the number of children to care for and their age, the greater the perceived parenting stress. The financial state is also extremely difficult for single mothers, as they are more likely to be unemployed or work parttime and have no other source of income from a spouse. They are pressured by the need to balance jobs and family commitments, as well as the accompanying obligations, such as daycare arrangements (Dor, 2021).

Despite the differences in the gap between stay-at-home moms and working moms towards burnout, both of them are sharing the same action and plan to reduce and avoid burnout. As evidence, according to Motherly's 2022 State of Motherhood Survey Report, the plan to expand the family has been delayed due to sentiments of exhaustion and this was agreed upon by both the working moms and stay-at-home moms. However, 38% of those who said they do not want to be pregnant again are unemployed, and 27% are unsure if they want more children. Therefore, there is only a small amount of mothers who have the intention of not giving birth after experiencing burnout.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework which explains the relationship between dependent variables and independent variables for the purpose of identifying the gap in burnout among mothers. In this study, burnout toward stay-at-home moms and working moms are a dependent variable that has a connection with five independent variables, namely the factors

that contribute to burnout such as Support System, Work, Attitude, Environment, and Expectations.

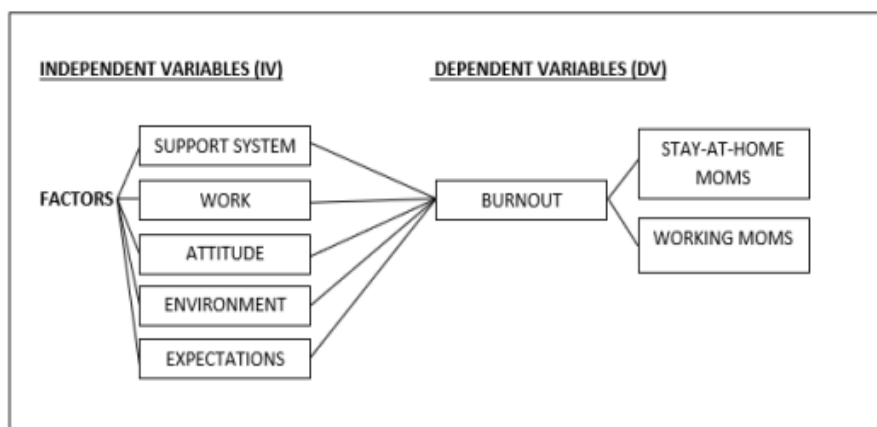


Figure 2 - Model of the relationship between stay-at-home moms and working moms toward burnout.

The purpose of this study focuses on the gap in burnout between stay-at-home moms and working moms. Therefore, there might be several factors that need to be identified that will contribute to burnout among these two types of mothers. On the other hand, parental burnout is a concerning condition because of both its prevalence and the seriousness of its effects (Roskam, 2021). The direct relationship of burnout between stay-at-home moms and working moms helps in mirroring research objectives. Therefore, as a dependent variable, burnout needs to be measured in order to achieve the purpose of this study.

Methodology

The quantitative research method used in this study involves stay-at-home moms and working moms in Seremban. The total population number of mothers in Seremban is 4,866 which includes stay-at-home moms and working moms. The data was obtained from the Department of Statistics Malaysia in Negeri Sembilan. Since it is impossible to use all of them in this study, the sample size will be determined using the table from Krejcie and Morgan. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) developed a table for estimating sample size for a given population with easy reference. Based on the table, the estimated sample size that needs to be taken is 354 which includes stay-at-home moms and working moms. However, 20% of the sample needs to be added as a method to prevent any unreturned rate and drop-out. Therefore, the final sample size for this study is 425.

The purpose of this study is to identify the level of burnout among stay-at-home moms and working moms in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan. Therefore, in order to get feedback from the mothers, a set of questionnaires will be created based on variables for this study and will be given to the mothers as the respondents. The questionnaire will consist of questions that come in series in order to gain information from the respondents. The question for this study will be developed in dual languages which are English and Malay language. The proposed questionnaire will be in 7 sections: 1) Section A: Demographic data of respondents 2) Section B: Support System 3) Section C: Work 4) Section D: Attitude 5) Section E: Environment 6) Section F: Expectations 7) Section G: Burnout. Five-point Likert scales are used to respond to each statement which different statement to cater every section in the questionnaire.

Data is analysed using SPSS software package version 26. The total percentage is used to assess the demographic profile data. Meanwhile, the burnout items are analysed by using

the mean value. Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis is performed to verify the reliability of the work burnout items used in the survey. Meanwhile, the value of Cronbach's Alpha for a dependent variable of burnout shows 0.866 which is also exceeding 0.6.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

	Profiles	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	20 - 30 years old	53	22.1
	31 - 40 years old	99	41.3
	41 - 50 years old	54	22.5
	Above 50 years old	34	14.2
Race	Malay	139	57.9
	Chinese	50	20.8
	Indian	50	20.8
	Others	1	0.4
Category of moms	Stay-at-home mom	104	43.3
	Working mom	136	56.7
Marital status	Living with a partner	213	88.8
	Single mom	27	11.3
Number of children	1 - 2	117	48.8
	3 - 4	96	40.0
	5 - 6	24	10.0
	More than 7	3	1.3

Figure 2 – Demographic profiles

Based on Table 4.1 above, the majority of the respondents are in a group age of 31 to 40 years old (41.3%) followed by respondents with group age of 41 to 50 years old (22.5%). Most of the respondents are Malay (57.9%) followed by Chinese and Indian with the same percentage of 20.8%. Next, the majority of the respondents are categorized as working moms (56.7%) and the rest are stay-at-home moms (43.3%). Nearly all of the respondents are living with a partner (88.8%) and the remainder are single moms (11.3%). Furthermore, most of the respondents are in a group of having 1 to 2 children (48.8%) 42 followed by 3 to 4 children (40%), then 5 to 6 children (10%) and respondents with more than 7 children have the least percentage (1.3%).

Findings for Level of burnout

This section presents analysed data to answer research question 1: What is the level of burnout among stay-at-home moms and working moms?

Level of Burnout among Stay-At-Home Moms and Working Moms

	Level of Burnout among Stay-At-Home Moms	Level of Burnout among Working Moms
N	104	136
Mean	2.5750	2.4206
Standard Deviation	0.93047	0.97321

Figure 3- Level of burnout among stay-at-home moms and working moms

Figure 3 presents the result of level of burnout among stay-at-home moms and working moms. The statistical technique of descriptive analysis has been used to study the first research objectives. The descriptive analysis was based on mean and standard deviation. For each statement in the questionnaire which involves the variable of burnout, the Likert scale was used to guide the respondents in giving the rate based on their own experiences and preferences. Likert scale defines 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. Subsequently, the low level is represented by a scale of 1 to 2, the medium level by a scale of 3, and the high level by a scale of 4 to 5. Since the mean values among stay-at-home moms and working moms are 2.5750 and 2.4206 respectively, thus it falls within a scale of 2 to 3. This indicates that the levels of burnout among stay-at-home moms and working moms are low to medium as both of the values nearly fall under the scale of 3.

Findings for gap analysis between stay-at-home moms and working moms toward burnout

This section presents data to answer research question 2: What is the gap analysis between stay-at-home moms and working moms toward burnout?

Variables	Mean Value	
	Stay-At-Home Mom	Working Mom
Support System	3.0865	3.0176
Work	3.6519	3.6471
Attitude	2.6962	2.8118
Environment	3.0500	2.9868
Expectations	2.7404	2.5956
Burnout	2.5750	2.4206

Figure 4 - mean for gap analysis between stay-at-home moms and working moms toward burnout

Figure 4 shows the mean values for all variables which resulted from a descriptive analysis on stay-at-home moms and working moms. It can be seen that the mean values for all variables under stay-at-home moms are higher than working moms except for Attitude. However, when the researchers compared each value between stay-at-home moms and working moms, it does not differ much as almost all variables fall between the same scale. For example, the mean value for Support System among stay-at-home moms is 3.865 while among working moms is 3.0176. It still falls under the same scale which is 3. The same goes for other variables except for Environment. This indicates that there is a small gap between stay-at-home moms and working moms toward burnout.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussion

From the findings above its show that burnout among stay-at-home moms and working moms is moderate level and there is a small gap between them.

This finding indicates that the levels of burnout among stay-at-home moms and working moms are low to medium as both of the values 51 nearly fall under the scale of 3. It can clearly

be seen that even though both groups of mothers have quite different obligations and responsibilities as mothers, it is roughly found that the mothers in Seremban are able to manage their daily duties as mothers and workers very well. Since the level of burnout among these two categories of mothers is low to medium, researchers also believe that the level of burnout among mothers in this area is not at a serious level for now.

Therefore, it can be said that the majority of mothers in this Seremban area still have stable and healthy emotions in managing their families. It is likely that the mothers already consider daily tasks at home and work as real tasks as a mother that needs to be done. There are times when these mothers will also feel tired, but with the availability of efficient management, it can help reduce the burden faced by the mothers.

The analysis of the result shows each value between stay-at-home moms and working moms does not differ much as almost all variables fall between the same scale of 2 to 3. Therefore, the answer is there is a small gap between stay-at-home moms and working moms toward burnout. Just like in a 2020 survey that has been stated before, more than half of women stated they had faced workplace discrimination, such as being asked to do more work than men for the same job description. While for stay-at-home moms, not only is there a lot to do, but it's often the same activities over and over again, making one day feel practically identical to the next without a break (Black, 2022).

As we can see, the findings found that stay-at-home moms faced a lack of support system in their family which brought them to burnout. A support system is a group of people who can be relied on to help out when needed, especially in tough situations, or who can offer emotional or practical assistance. According to Hood (2020), having a strong support system has many positive benefits which include reducing depression, anxiety and reducing stress. Therefore, in order to increase the support system, the mothers first need to communicate with their families. The mothers need to be honest and not afraid to admit that they are struggling or overworked and overwhelmed. Most spouses or children will understand if the mother expresses her tired grievances that the mothers need help and cooperation from them. Instead of family, having a harmonious social circle also can boost mood and improve physical health. The mothers can consider joining any grouping activities in order to interact and communicate with people. Therefore, by communication, it can help in increasing the support system of the mothers and also can prevent burnout among mother.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings have answered these two comparisons that even though the mothers have different pressures in life, both of the mothers are likely to say that there is no difference if they are working or just becoming a housewife because both of the mothers still feel the burnout. Hence, what the researchers can conclude is there is small gap between stay-at-home moms and working moms toward burnout in this Seremban area. Therefore, this study is allowed to disprove the views of some people who have a viewpoint that staying home and raising children is a copout for women to just sit home and do nothing. But the reality is that stay-at-home mothers have an endless list of responsibilities since they are never off the job and never get to go home. This same goes for the working moms who have their own responsibilities too.

This study aims to determine the level of burnout among between stay-at-home moms and working moms and its gap between them. It is recommended that future researchers focus their research on factors that lead to the burnout among stay-at-home moms and working moms. This includes focussing on the roles of employer and also government in

setting up a policy which assist the moms in having a proper life balance and reducing stress and depression among them.

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