

Mom Shaming : A Mental Health Analysis Of Young Moms Who Are In Makassar City

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ABSTRACT

Background. Mom Shaming is still widely found in the form of criticism and negative comments that are demeaning and belittling mothers in every decision made on childcare patterns, young age and lack of previous experience in taking care of children make mothers often doubted. This has an impact on the mental health of young mothers which affects emotional well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being.

Aim. This study aims to analyze the mental health of young mothers who are victims of mom shaming based on their emotional state, psychological state and social state.

Methods. Qualitative research with a phenomenological study approach. The informants in this study were 9 young mothers who were victims of mom shaming recruited using the snowball sampling method. The data were gathered through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, and subsequently analyzed using thematic descriptive analysis.

Results. This study shows the mental health status of young mothers who are victims of mom shaming, namely 2 people with good mental health status, 4 people with moderate mental health status and 3 people with poor mental health status. This negatively affects mental health, as young mothers exhibit symptoms of depression, including feelings of sadness, frequent crying, hopelessness, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, guilt toward their children, and negative self-perceptions (such as viewing themselves as bad or failed mothers). Additionally, the experience of mom shaming was found to impact emotional, psychological, and social well-being. The perpetrators of mom shaming are the closest people, in-laws, siblings, sisters-in-law, neighbors and coworkers.

Conclusion. Mom shaming affects the mental health of young mothers which has an impact on emotional conditions, psychological conditions and social conditions. It is expected that victims of mom shaming should improve their abilities and skills in parenting to be more courageous and confident to fight the perpetrators of mom shaming.

Keywords: mom shaming, mental health, emotional condition, psychological condition, social condition and young mothers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mom shaming is a term that refers to the act of criticizing mothers by people who try to control how a woman becomes a mother. (5). *Mom shaming* is a critical behavior that is thrown at a mother by others that can embarrass, degrade, insult, or even hurt her feelings. *Mom shaming behavior* that occurs also varies, from insulting physical appearance to tending to insult and denigrate parenting or the mother's parenting style towards her child and family. The perpetrators of *mom shaming* are in the mother's closest circle, starting from family such as husband, parents, relatives or the neighborhood (14).

Health Collaborative Center (HCC) 2024 reported the incidence of *mom shaming* in Indonesia at 72% and mostly experienced by young mothers, the results of the study showed that 7 out of 10 mothers in Indonesia have experienced a form of *mom shaming*. If this *mom shaming* is allowed to continue and persist, then the greatest risk is that 56% of mothers experience mental health disorders. In addition, 65.7% of mothers also feel ashamed and guilty about the accusations. The high incidence of *mom shaming* which has an impact on the mental health of mothers and affects parenting patterns, this study found that only 11 percent of women received or sought counseling assistance. In fact, only 23% of mothers admitted to daring to fight and avoid mom shaming treatment(35).

Mothers who have experienced *mom shaming* and have dual roles as wives and mothers have a negative correlation between husband's social support and maternal anxiety. (22). Mothers who have experienced *mom shaming* with their dual roles even

though they have support from their husbands, have higher levels of anxiety because the social pressure received from the surrounding environment is greater regarding parenting which makes mothers feel worried and guilty. shows that most young mothers have experienced mom shaming (57%) and most young mothers experience moderate anxiety as many as 70 people (88.6%). The average anxiety in young mothers who have experienced *mom shaming* is 92.93 and the average anxiety in young mothers who have never experienced *mom shaming* is 68.71 so it can be concluded that there is a difference between the anxiety of young mothers (27).

Young mothers who are victims of *mom shaming* show that the perpetrators of *mom shaming* against mothers are people closest to them, this has a negative impact on physiological, psychological, and social aspects (27). Every time they receive criticism and comments that are insulting or even degrading regarding their parenting patterns, it will affect the mother's emotional condition, in their interactions, mothers often feel sad or even angry with the criticism and comments they receive (28). The emotional condition of mothers who receive this *mom shaming* action can actually trigger anxiety disorders that can even lead to depression and suicidal tendencies (2).

Mom shaming is said to have the potential to affect psychological conditions because mothers do not have confidence in their parenting decisions (1). Based on a study in the *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, mothers who experience *mom shaming* will experience anxiety and depression (32). *Mom shaming* can make a mother feel inadequate and always feel that there is something lacking in the way she raises her child, and feel that she cannot be the best mother for her child. A mother who receives *mom shaming* also tends to have higher expectations of her parenting abilities. If these expectations are not met, the mother has the potential to experience stress, anxiety, and even depression (7).

Social conditions have the potential to be a source of stress for mothers who experience mom shaming. Generally, the perpetrators of mom shaming are people in the surrounding environment, such as parents, in-laws, neighbors, siblings-in-law, and even strangers.(29). A mother who gets support from her environment can make the mother more resistant to the negative effects of stress.(16).

Mom shaming affects the mental health of young mothers, parenting patterns, and the relationship between mother and child (23). The parenting patterns chosen by some mothers are often different from the parenting patterns of other mothers. This is the main reason why *mom shaming perpetrators* give negative comments because they feel that their parenting pattern is the best and ideal (6).

According to the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN), a person is considered a young mother if she has her first child between the ages of 20-30 (3). years. Young mothers aged 25 years and under have been identified as having a very high risk of experiencing mental illness during the perinatal period, with postnatal depression up to twice as common in teenage mothers compared to those aged over 20 years. (18).

Mom shaming is one of the verbal violence experienced by housewives. Based on data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection as of January 1, 2024, there were 13,774 cases of verbal violence against women (14). Data from the Makassar City Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Service in 2023 recorded cases with the most victims of verbal violence experienced by women aged 15-25 years as many as 367 cases. Verbal violence experienced by victims in the form of shouting, cursing, giving negative nicknames, ostracizing and belittling (8).

From the results of the initial data collection, researchers conducted online screening using *Google media. form* for young mothers with children aged 0-5 years in Makassar City (n=18). The screening results showed that 100% of participants had experienced *mom shaming* in the last 3 months. The forms of *mom shaming* experienced were criticism or comments that embarrassed, belittled, insulted, or even hurt the feelings of young mothers who were victims of *mom shaming* related to childcare patterns such as how to feed, how to carry, breastfeeding choices, poor quality breast milk, the physical condition of the mother and child, the mother's decision to marry at a young age, the spacing between the mother's pregnancies, the mother's decision to work and become a housewife. Aspects that affect the mental health felt by the victims include emotional, psychological and social conditions such as feelings of stress, anxiety, depression, shame, guilt, chaotic thoughts that make it difficult to focus or concentrate, and low self-esteem. Based on these things, the researcher wants to study in more depth the information about the mental health of young mothers who are victims of *mom shaming* in Makassar City.

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study design to measure the mental health of young mothers who are victims of mom shaming in Makassar City, based on the emotional conditions, psychological conditions and social conditions of the experiences experienced by the research subjects. This study was conducted in Makassar City, starting from September 2024 to November 2024.

Informant

This study used snowball sampling to recruit informants, considering the sensitivity of the topic and the characteristics of

the population that are difficult to reach. Informants were selected based on certain criteria that were compiled based on theoretical considerations or operational constructs in accordance with the objectives of the study. These criteria include: (1) Young mothers aged 20-30 years, (2) have children aged 0-5 years, (3) have experienced mom shaming in at least the last 3 months, (4) live in Makassar City and (5) are willing to be informants. From these criteria, 9 young mothers who were victims of mom shaming were obtained as the main informants and there were 4 supporting informants who also provided information to add perspective to the information previously obtained from the main informant.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Characteristics of Informants

There were 13 informants who voluntarily participated in this study, consisting of several categories, namely main informants and supporting informants. The main informants with a total of 9 young mothers who were victims of mom shaming provided important information related to the topic being studied and the supporting informants who were the victim's family, as many as 4 people, including 2 mothers, 1 sibling and 1 husband of the young mother who was a victim of mom shaming who also provided information to add perspective to the information previously obtained from the main informant (table 1). The results of measuring the mental health of young mothers who were victims of mom shaming using the Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF) instrument (table 2). Interviews focused on three variables, namely emotional conditions, psychological conditions and social conditions. Through this approach, researchers aim to collect comprehensive data that covers various important aspects of the mental health of young mothers who are victims of mom shaming. In addition, the findings in this study, the experience of mom shaming is based on the form of natural mom shaming including child development, the mother's decision to marry young, conditions and perpetrators of mom shaming who are people closest to her. This form of mom shaming is a mom shaming sentence in local expressions

Table 1. Informant Characteristics

No	Informant Initials	Age	Marital status	Number of children	Residence	Living together	Work	Information
1	MH	22	Marry	2	Land's End	Husband	Work	Victims of Mom Shaming
2	AI	20	Divorce/Separate	1	Land's End	Parent	Doesn't work	Victims of Mom Shaming
3	WD	23	Marry	1	Mamajang	Husband	Work	Victims of Mom Shaming
4	WT	22	Marry	2	Land's End	Husband	Doesn't work	Victims of Mom Shaming
5	VI	24	Marry	3	Land's End	Husband	Doesn't work	Victims of Mom Shaming
6	AD	23	Marry	1	The Panakkukang	Parents in law	Doesn't work	Victims of Mom Shaming
7	ED	23	Marry	2	Mamajang	Parents and In-Laws	Doesn't work	Victims of Mom Shaming
8	ZE	26	Marry	1	Tamalanrea	Parent	Work	Victims of Mom Shaming
9	NH	26	Marry	1	Rappocini	Husband	Work	Victims of Mom Shaming
10	HY	38	Divorce by Death	1	Land's End	Parent	Work	Siblings of Mom Shaming Victims
11	TN	47	Marry	4	Mamajang	Husband	Doesn't work	Mother Victim of Mom

						d		Shaming
12	MA	45	Marry	3	The Panakkukang	Husband	Doesn't work	Mother of Mom Shaming Victim
13	RN	31	Marry	2	Land's End	Wife	Work	Husband Victim of Mom Shaming

Table 3.1 shows that in general, the characteristics of informants vary. The majority of informants are young (20-30 years old), married and have 1-3 children. Most of them live with their spouses or parents, and some of them are employed and unemployed. All informants in this study have experienced mom shaming, either as direct victims or as family members of victims. The majority of mom shaming victims were young mothers aged 20-26, The area with the most victims is Ujung Tanah, followed by Mamajang and Panakkukang. They experienced social pressures related to parenting from the neighborhood, and family support was an important factor in their well-being.

1.2 Mom Shaming Experience

Mom shaming experiences can be seen based on the form of mom shaming experienced by the victim and the perpetrator of mom shaming itself. Here is a table of mom shaming experiences, namely:

Table 2. Mom Shaming Experience

No	Informant Initials	Mom Shaming Experience	
		Forms of <i>mom shaming</i> experienced	Mom shaming perpetrators
1	MH	Child growth and development	Neighbor
2	AI	Mother's decision to marry young	Neighbor
3	WD	Physical condition of mother and child	Workmate
4	WT	Breast milk is not of good quality	Brother-in-law
5	VI	Distance between pregnancies	Neighbor
6	AD	Mother's decision to work	You
7	ED	Breastfeeding Options and Parenting Patterns	Neighbor
8	ZE	Breastfeeding options	Family
9	NH	Physical condition of mother and child	Neighbor

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Based on table 2, it shows that the experience of mom shaming based on the form of *mom shaming* experienced is related to child development, the mother's decision to marry young, the physical condition of the mother and her child, poor quality breast milk, the distance between pregnancies, the mother's decision to work and the choice of breastfeeding. This can be seen from the following quote:

".... If they insult my child who can't talk yet, I can still accept it, but this has happened repeatedly and it really bothers me. In addition, because my child's development is not in accordance with children of his age, they think I can't take care of a child." (MH, 22 years old, Young Mother Victim of Mom Shaming , Interview 09/27/2024)

".... During family gatherings, I am often embarrassed because of what some people say about the very close age gap between my children. My decision to have another child does not receive support from those around me." (VI, 24 years old, Young Mother Victim of Mom Shaming , Interview 10/21/2024)

Informant MH felt that the negative comments received repeatedly related to the growth and development of her child who could not speak yet were not like children of the same age. Informant MH felt that her child was being compared too much with other people's children. This made informant MH experience *mood swings* because she was always considered unable to take care of her child well. The same thing experienced by informant MH was also experienced by informant VI who felt

that the negative comments received were embarrassing because the age gap between her children was very close. Informant VI was considered unable to manage the spacing of her pregnancies well, this made informant VI feel ashamed because the people around her questioned her decision to have another child too much and considered having more children as a disgrace for someone. The results of the study showed that informants had different experiences of *mom shaming*, the *mom shaming* experienced was in the nature of cornering and blaming the victim regarding *parenting* or child rearing patterns.

Then for the perpetrators of *mom shaming*, it is usually obtained from people closest to them such as neighbors, in-laws, siblings/in-laws and coworkers. This can be seen from the quote:

“... When I go out of the house, my neighbors always reprimand and mock me because of my decision to have another child, I am considered like a cat that gives birth to many children at once, besides that, the neighbors also always tell me to regulate the spacing of my pregnancies because the age gap between my children is too close. This makes me feel hurt by them.” (VI, 24 years old, Young Mother Victim of Mom Shaming, Interview 10/21/2024)

“... My child is always compared to children of the same age, because my child cannot talk like children of the same age. This makes me lazy to socialize with neighbors to avoid bad discussions related to my child who is slow to talk”. (MH, 22 years old, Young Mother Victim of Mom Shaming, Interview 09/27/2024)

“... When I talk to my coworkers, I often get bad talk about my child's nutritional status. Some people think my child is skinny and small and they think I can't take care of a child.” (WD, 23 years old, Young Mother Victim of Mom Shaming, Interview 13/10/2024)

“... Every day I am reprimanded on how to take care of my children, this makes me hurt because I don't want to be a disobedient child, so I don't fight back against my in-laws.” (ED, 22 years old, Young Mother Victim of Mom Shaming, Interview 10/28/2024)

Informant VI stated that criticism and negative comments were received from her neighbors who always commented on informant VI regarding the age gap between her children which was too close. The same thing was also experienced by informant MH who stated that the perpetrators of *mom shaming* were obtained from her neighbors regarding the growth and development of her child who was still slow to speak unlike children his age. In addition, informant WD stated that negative comments were related to her child's physical condition which was compared to other children. While informant ED stated that negative comments were obtained from her in-laws.

perpetrators of *mom shaming* found by informants in this research findings came from people closest to the informant, namely neighbors, in-laws and coworkers. This makes it difficult for informants to express their complaints and prefer to remain silent and isolate themselves from the environment because they feel hurt by the criticism and negative comments received. This criticism and negative comments make informants sad and even cry because they feel embarrassed, belittled and underestimated by those closest to them. Where the closest people who should provide support actually become the perpetrators of *mom shaming*.

1.3 Mental Health Status

Mental health status of young mothers who are victims of *mom shaming* based on emotional conditions, psychological conditions and social conditions. In the findings of this study, as many as 9 informants were measured for their mental health using the *Mental Health Continuum-Short Form* (MHC-SF) instrument. The following is a table of the mental health status of young mothers who are victims of mom shaming, namely:

Table 3. Mental Health Status

Informant Initials	Age	Score	Mental Health Status
MH	22	24	Currently
AI	20	17	Bad
WD	23	47	Good
WT	22	25	Currently
VI	24	16	Bad
AD	23	15	Bad
ED	23	48	Good
ZE	26	35	Currently
NH	26	32	Currently

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Based on Table 3, the mental health status of young mothers who are victims of mom shaming is 2 people with good mental health status, 4 people with moderate mental health status and 3 people with poor mental health status.

1. Emotional Condition

Based on the findings in this study on 9 informants who were willing to do in-depth interviews on the mental health status of young mothers who were victims of *mom shaming*, several emotional conditions that tended to be experienced by informants were feelings of joy and happiness, feelings of sadness, crying, fear and anger. Generally, in the findings of this study, the emotional conditions most often felt by informants were feelings of sadness to crying because they were considered bad mothers.

The feeling of anger that arises is caused by negative comments from the perpetrators of *mom shaming* which makes the mother think so that she is afraid of becoming a mother who fails in every decision taken regarding her parenting pattern. Negative comments received in the form of belittling and demeaning the informant whose child's development is not according to his age, in this case what is meant is that the child cannot speak like children his age. The feelings of sadness and fear experienced are because people in the surrounding environment tend to blame the informant for her decision to marry young, but currently the informant no longer lives with her husband and has no experience in taking care of babies so that the informant tends to be doubted in taking care of children. The consequences of negative comments also cause feelings of worry by the mother because she is not being herself. When the mother gets negative comments related to her weight gain after giving birth, the mother tries and wants to appear better to meet other people's expectations without thinking about herself first who is breastfeeding and is dangerous for her at that time if she takes weight loss medication.

2. Psychological Conditions

Based on the findings in this study on 9 informants who were willing to do in-depth interviews on the mental health status of young mothers who were victims of *mom shaming*, it was found that several psychological conditions that tend to be experienced by informants are *overthinking*, anxiety, stress, despair and depression. This condition is caused by negative comments received by informants from people closest to them regarding the provision of Exclusive Breastfeeding, physical condition and child development. Informants become *overthinking* because these comments are received repeatedly so that they make informants think. Informants become desperate because these comments are very disturbing even though informants have tried to give their best, but there are several factors beyond the informant's control that make informants feel guilty towards themselves and their children.

3. Social Conditions

Based on the findings in this study on 9 informants who were willing to do in-depth interviews on the mental health status of young mothers who were victims of *mom shaming*, several social conditions that tend to be experienced by informants are choosing to remain silent, not being confident, limiting and avoiding, closing themselves off and having difficulty in making decisions. The most frequent response made by informants when being belittled and belittled is that informants choose to remain silent because they do not want to cause problems. In addition, informants also become distrustful because they feel lacking in everything so that when they receive reprimands or negative comments on their decisions in parenting patterns, breastfeeding choices, it is often associated with the informant's age being too young and having no experience in parenting making informants helpless when receiving negative comments.

The informant felt that by avoiding and limiting herself from her surroundings, she did not need to feel hurt and listen to negative comments about herself or her child. In addition, the informant preferred to spend time with her family rather than responding to bad things received from other people. Family or partners are needed by informants to express their complaints and sorrows, telling bad things experienced makes them a little better because they feel supported by their partner or family. Therefore, support from partners or family is important when experiencing *mom shaming* received from the surrounding environment such as neighbors.

However, it is very unfortunate because there are informants whose source of *mom shaming* is received from their mother-in-law, besides that the informant, her husband and child live together, making it difficult for the informant to make decisions in terms of *parenting* because they do not get support from their partners. The informant's decision to work is the reason the informant always gets reprimands and negative comments from her in-laws. The informant chooses to work to help the family's economy and the needs of her children, in contrast to the view of her mother-in-law who considers her a bad mother because she prefers to work rather than take care of her children.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Emotional Condition

The results of the analysis of emotional conditions experienced by young mothers who are victims of *mom shaming* are feelings of happiness, sadness, crying, fear and anger. The emotional condition most often felt by informants is feeling sad to the point of crying because of criticism and negative comments received from those closest to them. Becoming a mother

at a young age experiences changes and positive emotions are clearly visible, but unfortunately the consequences of early pregnancy and marriage are basically very detrimental (10). This affects adolescent girls' interpersonal relationships, educational and career opportunities, emotional well-being, psychological well-being and access to support networks or social welfare (4). Emotional conditions are influenced by the perpetrators of *mom shaming*, namely the closest people, namely family, and the residential environment such as neighbors (24). Between one mother and another, they compare their parenting patterns and consider their parenting patterns better than other mothers. Negative comments received from people closest to them that are comparative between one individual and another affect emotional changes, making someone sad and even cry (11).

4.2 Psychological Conditions

The results of the analysis of psychological conditions experienced by young mothers who are victims of *mom shaming* are feelings of *overthinking*, anxiety, stress, despair and depression. The most common psychological conditions experienced are *overthinking* and stress. The decision to marry young is the thing that most affects the psychological condition of the informant, this can be seen from the health status category of young mothers who are victims of *mom shaming* which shows a mental health condition in the poor category. This study also found that informants married at a young age because of the wishes of their parents who were involved in economic problems at that time. This is in line with research Jack et al. (2022) which shows that economic factors cause teenage girls to drop out of school, thus encouraging teenage girls to marry early.

In this study, young mothers need space to help themselves overcome the negative impacts of the forms of *mom shaming* they receive from those closest to them. Of the 9 informants who were interviewed in-depth, it was confirmed that they complained about their status living with their in-laws and sisters-in-law. The mother's living arrangements affect the risk of *postpartum depression* (PPD), especially among women with anxiety during pregnancy, many postpartum depressions are found in women who live with their in-laws (19). Living with mothers-in-law affects the level of anxiety experienced by women in China, namely 4,183 young mothers who live with their in-laws, 1,069 of whom experience excessive anxiety to depression and suicidal tendencies. (18).

In this case, the decision of young mothers to work is due to unstable family economic factors, which requires informants to work to help the family economy. Women who work at a young age with a family status can worsen their psychological or mental health (33). Women who work with a family status and have children show more prominent symptoms of depression among those who are not yet married. (15). Husband's support can balance the emotions of working mothers, thereby creating satisfaction in life, which is one aspect of subjective well-being. (9).

4.3 Social Conditions

The results of the analysis of social conditions in this study are that young mothers who are victims of *mom shaming* choose to remain silent, limit themselves/avoid, lack self-confidence, close themselves off and have difficulty making decisions. The most common social conditions experienced are silence, limiting themselves and difficulty in making decisions due to the influence of the surrounding environment. *Mom shaming behavior* refers to the act of criticizing or judging a mother for her parenting choices, often in a negative way or being considered a bad mother because of her young age so that informants are often underestimated for their life choices and parenting patterns. For a young mother, the experience of *mom shaming* can feel heavier because they have to face challenges in carrying out the role of a mother at a young age. The criticisms that arise include whether they are mature enough, their parenting skills, career choices, or their social life (25). Support from those closest to them is needed for young mothers who are victims of *mom shaming* by their surroundings. However, becoming a mother at a young age faces a double burden in the form of stigma because they are considered immature and incompetent in being a mother. Young mothers in Southeast Asia have lower rates of initiation and continuation of breastfeeding. This is due to several factors including psychosocial stress, mothers who experience psychosocial stress affect the quality of breast milk given to their children, in addition to causing the possibility of breastfeeding to decrease. Maternal depression and psychosocial stressors can contribute to decreased breastfeeding rates. (9). In addition, in this study, young mothers who were victims of *mom shaming* experienced decreased self-confidence so that informants limited themselves to their environment. A total of 73 young women in Australia experienced discomfort and decreased self-esteem due to *mom shaming*. This study highlights the importance of support from those closest to young mothers who are victims of *mom shaming* by their surroundings (17). Support for young mothers who experience *mom shaming* is very important to help them stay strong and confident in their parenting journey. This study also highlights the experiences of young mothers who are victims of *mom shaming* on the relationship and involvement of professional health workers and the impact of *mom shaming* itself which causes them to be less open or closed to their surroundings to obtain health services. These findings have implications for the development of coping strategies for young mothers who experience *mom shaming* and highlight the potential for support from those closest to them in overcoming the negative impacts of the forms of *mom shaming* experienced.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

The mental health of young mothers who are victims of mom shaming impacts their emotional, psychological and social well-being. Emotionally, they feel sad and often cry due to negative comments. Psychologically, they experience overthinking, stress, and depression due to criticism of their parenting, breastfeeding quality, and decision to marry young. Socially, they tend to withdraw from a dismissive environment, making it difficult to make decisions, including regarding contraceptive use.

Suggestions

Victims of mom shaming are advised to improve their self-confidence and parenting skills, and dare to fight back or report to the authorities. The Makassar City Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection is recommended to organize campaigns on mental health and the impact of verbal abuse, and work with the Health Office to provide easily accessible mental health services for mothers. Future researchers are advised to explore the experience of mom shaming in a wider age group and from the perspective of both victims and perpetrators.

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