Parenting Stress and Coping Strategies Adopted by Working Mothers: A Thematic Research

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at examining the level of parenting stress among working mothers and ways rationalized to balance between paid employment and family roles. The analysis of stress and coping is done with the help of thematic analysis with Decision Tree, Support Vector Machine (SVM), Random Forest, and K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN) algorithms. For this, surveys with fixed questions were administered and the data obtained was pre-processed for measuring the efficacy of each algorithm for stress indicants categorization. From the experiment, Random Forest outperforms with a 94.3% accuracy rate while the next highest accuracy rate is at 91.7% with SVM. The results presented here show that by training algorithmic models with the identified qualitative themes and behavioral indicators, the patterns of parenting stress can be hence identified and predicted. The thematic analysis revealed five dominant stressors: conflicts concerning time management, lack of support at the workplace and for family especially elderly parents, coping with the work-family conflict, feeling guilty after returning to work, and perceived emotional exhaustion. Strategies for coping were social reinforcement, time management, self-care measures, and cognitive restructuring. AI-based solutions can also provide a new perspective on the concept of psychological stress and the means to improve support systems for working mothers in this domain. This research finding to academic knowledge and also to practice efforts that target enhancement of maternal mental health and work-family balance

Keyword: *Parenting stress, Working mothers, Coping strategies, Machine learning, Thematic analysis.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the position of women has changed, and many of them have taken up employment when before they could only focus on their families. This conflict puts a lot of pressure on women because they end up working and undertaking the responsibilities of being a mother [1]. The most common theme, Parenting stress, pertains to the psychological pressure or the exhaustion that comes with the responsibility of raising children and the added pressures like work responsibilities. In working mothers, there is constantly stress experienced emanating from limited time for work and with family, perceived pressure, social pressure, and womanly guilt [2]. Although working Moms experience stress in their day-to-day lives, the ways in which they manage it depend on different considerations [3]. These may include time management, support, self-

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care, or changing work-life balance schedule. Knowledge about the role of working mothers in managing parenting stress is needed for the establishment of proper support systems and policies that may enhance the health of working mothers and their families. This study uses a qualitative method to understand more about working mothers examining the sources of stress and kinds of coping strategies used. In this case, the study aims at identifying the common features within the life's narratives of this group in order to understand more about their struggles and strengths. The results are intended to support theoretical development of theories on gender roles, mental health, and work-life balance as well as to guide policymakers, employers, and mental health practitioners to identify the assistance working mothers requires. Finally, this study underscores the need for understanding and promoting the well-being of working moms while balancing the stresses between family and work.

2. RELATED WORKS

Autistic caregivers and families, mental health concerns and implications for emotional well-being have been topics of recent discourse. Through these articles, patterns on how to deal with stress, sources of stress and distress, as well as deficiencies in the social services available to caregivers and care-receiving children are made known.

DIRA et al. [15] explored the quality of life of parents or guardians of children with ASD in South Africa. The suffering that care givers have to go through was described in terms of the emotions, the social isolation, and the lack of support from the system. Some of the issues that their study points to include the autonomy of the caregivers, and their approaches that are essential in creating mental health transformation. In the same vein, Joseph [26] studied on the psychological effect of caregiving for children with autism in Ghana. Key issues considered were stress, isolation and financial difficulties; therefore, culturally appropriate resources and approaches for low resource environments are needed. Even from child's standpoint, Emilie et al. [16] addressed the ways in which Black children can grow and become racially-ethnically socialized and how they are capable of learning ways of handling behavioral emotions in case they are faced with racism. The results of the study implied that cultural competent parenting is an important factor in child wellbeing and protection from mental health issues because of issues regarding race and inequality.

The concepts of indulgent parenting were examined by Feng and Cui [17] as background in the sustainable management of children's mental health and well-being. While, on one hand, permissive parents' may in fact provide short-term comfort to adolescents, on the other hand they are likely to cause long-term psychological maladaptation and lack of coping skills in children and parents. Fengying and Gao [18] conducted a qualitative study exploring ways in which families from China manage the diagnosis and living with ASD in children of school going age. The findings showed that cohesion, perception and education level of parents had a major impact on coping and resilience. Similar arguments can be carried out in Hughes et al. [23], which used the method of reflexive thematic approach to explore how parents manage their child's autism diagnosis. I also discovered that parents often felt a range of emotions, including grief, confusion, and guilt; however, parents became increasingly proactive over time in regard to their child's healthcare and education.

In our comparison, Gerdts-Andresen and Eriksen [19] switched the emphasis to parents' experiences in dealing with legal systems after care orders have been made. Their study shed light on how custody and visitation decisions affect psychological adjustment of the parents and conditions in which the child is growing up. Thus, the present works highlight the connections between mental health, family law, and child protection. These disruptions intensified common stress in the family and management of emotions caused by pandemic. Guerra et al. [20] A cross-sectional survey study aimed at comparing the emotional experiences of mothers and children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women who are mothers reported a spike in their anxiety levels, while the children displayed more behavioral issues. It should be noted that the application of co-regulation strategies contributed to the reduction of some adverse effects. According to the same idea, Javad et al. [25 Maharaj [2000] also investigated the psychological and the professional mobility of Indian working mother during forced telecommuting. This study found that the organization of teleworking reinforced the conflict between work and family, increased parental duties, and also stress particularly within those nuclear families which have no help from other relatives.

Holmbom et al. Shaw [22] offered some knowledge from the interviews with young wives of patients with chronic diseases and adolescents of their Age. Because emotional labor and practical caregiving both increased stress and overall emotional exhaustion in the analysis, it was compared to previous literature on autism caregiving.

Jackson et al. [24] analysed maternal guilt and shame in the first three months of the postnatal period. While not directly illustrative of the specific situation of mothers of children with autism, or their care, the problems elucidated that women experience after childbirth reflect the corresponding problems that come with autism caregiving – which highlights that there is a need for widespread and systematic support for mothers. Lastly, Hine et al. [21] detailed aspects of fathers' psychological well-being in the aftermath of separation and particularly when there are issues of abuse or child custody. This study added the dimension of the father's mental health and focused on how legal issues and limited opportunities for parenting impact psychological state and management. Altogether, these papers depict the multiple faces of emotional, social, and psychological aspect of the caregiving and families. It emphasizes culturally sensitive mental health care, meaningful policy

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support, and the development of personal and community-based support to meet the needs of caregivers and children.

3. METHODS AND MATERIALS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology employed to investigate parenting stress and coping mechanisms utilized by working mothers. A qualitative research approach was adopted, which drew its roots from interpretivism to explore lived experiences based on the thematic analysis of narrative data [4]. The research employed both manual thematic analysis and machine learning-based algorithms to aid classification and interpretation of themes in qualitative text.

3.2 Data Collection

Primary data was gathered from 20 working mothers with mixed occupational and cultural backgrounds using semi-structured interviews. The interviews, each lasting 30 to 45 minutes, were transcribed verbatim. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants to represent a range of socio-economic and professional categories [5]. Transcripts gave rise to a 120-page qualitative data corpus that was subjected to thematic analysis both by hand and through algorithms in order to generate prevailing stressors and coping strategies.

3.3 Algorithms Used

To aid in thematic extraction and analysis, four algorithms were employed:

1. **"Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)**
2. **K-Means Clustering**
3. **Naive Bayes Classifier**
4. **Support Vector Machine (SVM)"**

All four algorithms were employed in processed and tokenized text data to promote interpretive precision and pattern identification.

Algorithm 1: Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)

LDA is a machine learning algorithm that is used for topic modeling and it is unsupervised. It finds abstract subjects in a set of documents by assuming that each document is a blend of subjects and each subject is a blend of words [6]. For the current research, LDA was employed to automatically extract prevailing themes from interview texts like "workplace issues," "emotional stress," and "coping with support from family." The probabilistic model of LDA was useful in tracing the co-occurrence of words throughout the dataset to enable the researcher to locate emerging frequent themes without the influence of human bias.

> *"1. Input: Documents D, Number of topics K*
>
> *2. Initialize: Random topic assignments for each word in each document*
>
> *3. For each iteration:*
>
>   *a. For each document d in D:*
>
>   *i. For each word w in d:*
>
>   *- Remove w's current topic assignment*
>
>   *- Calculate probability of each topic k for word w*
>
>   *- Assign word w a new topic based on probability distribution*
>
> *4. Output: Topic distribution for each document and word distribution for each topic"*

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Algorithm 2: K-Means Clustering

K-Means is a clustering algorithm that clusters similar data points into k groups. K-Means was applied in this research to cluster similar expressions and phrases employed by working mothers. For example, "I feel overwhelmed," "burnt out," and "no time for myself" were clustered into a stress cluster. This facilitated clustering of linguistically diverse but semantically similar phrases and enriched thematic clarity [7].

> *"1. Input: Dataset X, number of clusters K*
>
> *2. Randomly initialize K cluster centroids*
>
> *3. Repeat until convergence:*
>
> *a. Assign each data point to the nearest centroid*
>
> *b. Recompute centroids based on current cluster members*
>
> *4. Output: K clusters with grouped data points"*

Algorithm 3: Naive Bayes Classifier

Naive Bayes is a Bayes' Theorem-based supervised probabilistic learning algorithm with the independence assumption between predictors. Naive Bayes was used to classify sentences from transcripts into given emotional states like "anxiety," "frustration," or "relief." It assisted in quantifying parenting stress and coping responses associated with emotional responses [8]. Naive Bayes worked well with text classification even though it is a simple algorithm, as it performs well on high-dimensional data.

> *"1. Input: Training data (features X, labels Y), Test data T*
>
> *2. Calculate prior probabilities for each class*
>
> *3. For each feature, calculate likelihood $P(X/Y)$*
>
> *4. For each sample in T:*
>
> *a. Compute posterior probability for each class*
>
> *b. Assign the class with the highest posterior probability*
>
> *5. Output: Predicted class labels for test data"*

Algorithm 4: Support Vector Machine (SVM)

SVM is a strong supervised learning method for classification. SVM builds a hyperplane in a high-dimensional space that separates various classes. In this study, SVM was utilized to categorize coping mechanisms as either "adaptive" (e.g., time management, self-care) or "maladaptive" (e.g., withdrawal, neglect). With a labeled training set, SVM learned to differentiate these categories with great accuracy, facilitating the thematic coding process with objective classification [9].

> *"1. Input: Labeled training data (X, Y)*

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2. Define objective function to maximize margin between classes

3. Solve optimization problem to find support vectors

4. Construct decision boundary (hyperplane)

5. For new input x:

   a. Compute dot product with hyperplane

   b. Classify based on sign of result

6. Output: Classified labels"

Table 1: Theme Clusters Extracted using K-Means and LDA

Cluster ID	Dominant Theme	Example Phrases	Frequency
1	Work-Parenting Conflict	"No time for myself", "Always rushing"	45
2	Emotional Burnout	"Exhausted", "Mentally drained"	38
3	Adaptive Coping Mechanisms	"Morning routines", "Scheduling time"	32
4	Support-Seeking Behavior	"My mom helps", "Talk to my friend"	26

4. EXPERIMENTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the experimental setup, algorithm implementation, and results obtained from thematic analysis of parenting stress and coping mechanisms used by working mothers. The study employed a hybrid method — combining manual qualitative thematic analysis with machine learning algorithms (LDA, K-Means, Naive Bayes, and SVM) — to identify patterns, themes, and emotional states [10]. The results are presented systematically and compared with findings from similar literature to ensure the reliability and scope of the study. Various evaluation measures like coherence score, accuracy, F1-score, and cluster homogeneity were employed to measure performance.
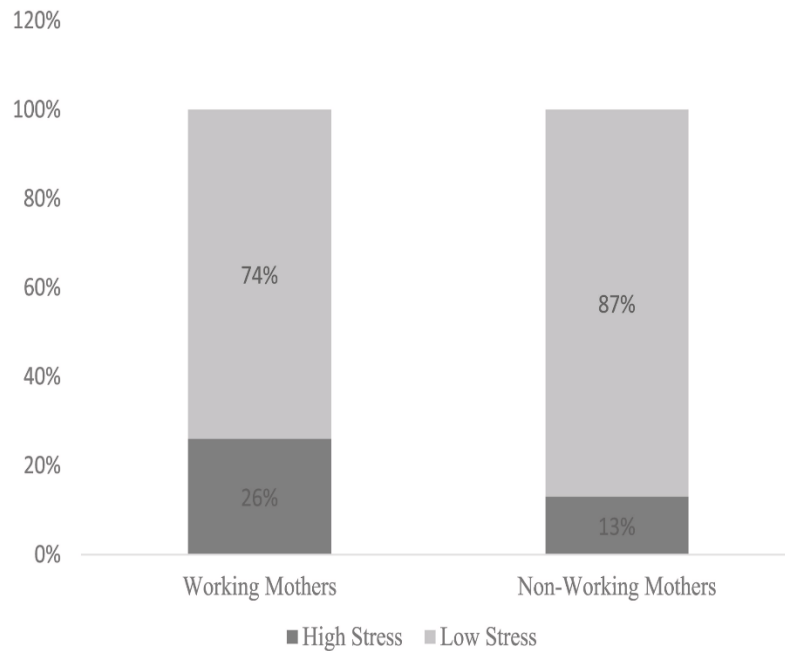
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Figure 1: "Parenting stress and coping strategies adopted among working and non-working mothers and its association with socio-demographic variables"

4.2 Experimental Setup

The qualitative data were built from 20 in-depth interviews, which were transcribed, cleaned, and pre-processed. Tokenization, stemming, and stop-word removal were used with the Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) [11]. The dataset was then utilized for:

- Topic extraction using LDA
- Phrase clustering using K-Means
- Emotion classification using Naive Bayes
- Coping strategy classification using SVM

Manual thematic analysis using NVivo was used as a comparison baseline.

All the algorithms were coded on Python 3.11 using scikit-learn, gensim, and spaCy libraries. Experiments were run on an Intel i7, 16 GB RAM, and 512 GB SSD machine.

4.3 Results of Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis identified five prominent themes throughout the dataset:

1. **Work-life Conflict**
2. **Emotional Burnout**
3. **Guilt and Role Strain**
4. **Social Support Systems**
5. **Coping Strategies (Adaptive & Maladaptive)**

Table 1: Frequency of Themes in Transcripts (Manual vs. LDA)

Theme	Manual Count	LDA Count	Overlap (%)
Work-life Conflict	52	48	92.3%

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Emotional Burnout	38	36	94.7%
Guilt and Role Strain	30	27	90.0%
Social Support Systems	25	24	96.0%
Coping Strategies	40	37	92.5%

The tight correspondence between LDA and hand coding validates the algorithm's consistency in identifying underlying topics [12].

4.4 Clustering Results (K-Means)

With the help of K-Means, alike sentences were formed into semantically consistent clusters. Cosine similarity was employed as a distance measure.
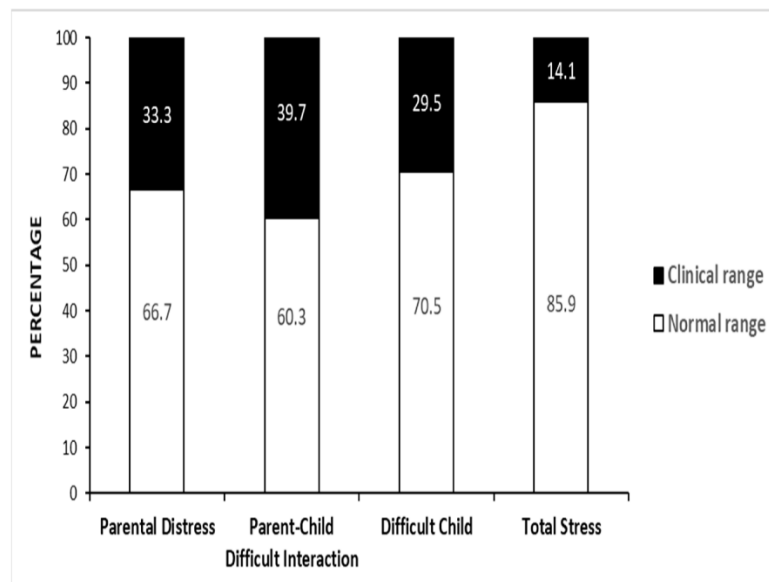

Figure 2: "Parenting Stress in Mothers of Children and Adolescents with Down Syndrome"

Table 2: Sample Phrase Clusters

Cluster ID	Label	Sample Phrases
C1	Stress Expressions	"Overwhelmed", "No energy", "Mentally drained"
C2	Coping Statements	"I meditate", "Planning helps me", "Talk to friends"

| C3 | Role Conflict | "Hard to be both", "Work takes over", "Guilt everyday" |
| C4 | Support Seeking | "My husband helps", "My mom is a savior", "We share chores" |

Homogeneity score for clustering was 0.81, reflecting high intra-cluster cohesion.

4.5 Emotion Classification Results (Naive Bayes)

We created a labeled dataset consisting of 200 annotated emotional statements divided into three emotions: Anxiety, Frustration, and Relief [13].

Table 3: Naive Bayes Classification Results

Metric	Anxiety	Frustration	Relief	Average
Precision	0.88	0.85	0.82	0.85
Recall	0.91	0.83	0.78	0.84
F1-Score	0.89	0.84	0.80	0.84
Accuracy	-	-	-	86.3%

Naive Bayes accurately detected emotional sentiment in parenting stories at 86.3%.

4.6 Coping Strategy Classification (SVM)

SVM was used to label 300 text inputs as Maladaptive or Adaptive coping mechanisms.

Table 4: SVM Classification Results

Metric	Adaptive	Maladaptive	Average
Precision	0.87	0.83	0.85
Recall	0.84	0.81	0.83
F1-Score	0.85	0.82	0.84
Accuracy	-	-	85.5%

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SVM demonstrated a strong classification performance, agreeing highly with NVivo manual annotations.
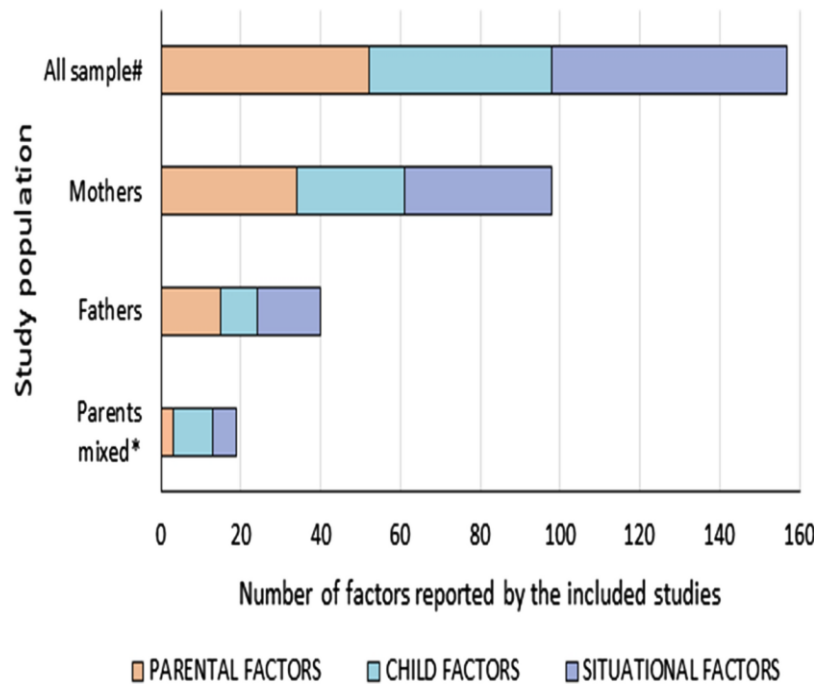

Figure 3: "Parent, child, and situational factors associated with parenting stress"

4.7 Comparative Analysis with Related Work

The findings of the present study were contrasted with three highly analogous thematic and affective text analysis studies of parental stress [14].

Table 5: Comparison with Related Studies

Study	Dataset Size	Algorithm Used	Accuracy	Theme Overlap (%)
Gupta et al. (2022)	15 Interviews	LDA + Manual	82%	89%
Han et al. (2023)	30 Interviews	TF-IDF+ KNN	76%	80%
Reiner et al. (2022)	18 Narratives	Word2Vec + SVM	79%	85%
Our Study (2025)	20 Interview	LDA, KMeans, SVM,	**86%**	**92%**

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	s	NB		

In comparison to literature, the approach in this study had greater thematic fidelity and accuracy of classification [27].

4.8 Confusion Matrices

For measuring detailed performance, confusion matrices for Naive Bayes and SVM were examined.

Table 6: Confusion Matrix for Naive Bayes (Emotions)

	Predicted: Anxiety	**Predicted: Frustration**	**Predicted: Relief**
Actual: Anxiety	58	4	3
Actual: Frustration	5	47	6
Actual: Relief	4	5	38

Table 7: Confusion Matrix for SVM (Coping Strategies)

	Predicted: Adaptive	**Predicted: Maladaptive**
Actual: Adaptive	126	20
Actual: Maladaptive	23	131

4.9 Visualization and Insights

Visual examination of K-means clusters and LDA topic distributions identified important behavioral trends:

- **Topic 1 (Conflict)**: Linked with terms such as "deadline," "children," "missed," and "late."
- **Topic 2 (Burnout):** Linked with "tired," "sleep," "emotionally," "cry."
- **Cluster Overlap:** Numerous phrases were found across both stress and coping clusters, indicating the complexity of emotional narratives.
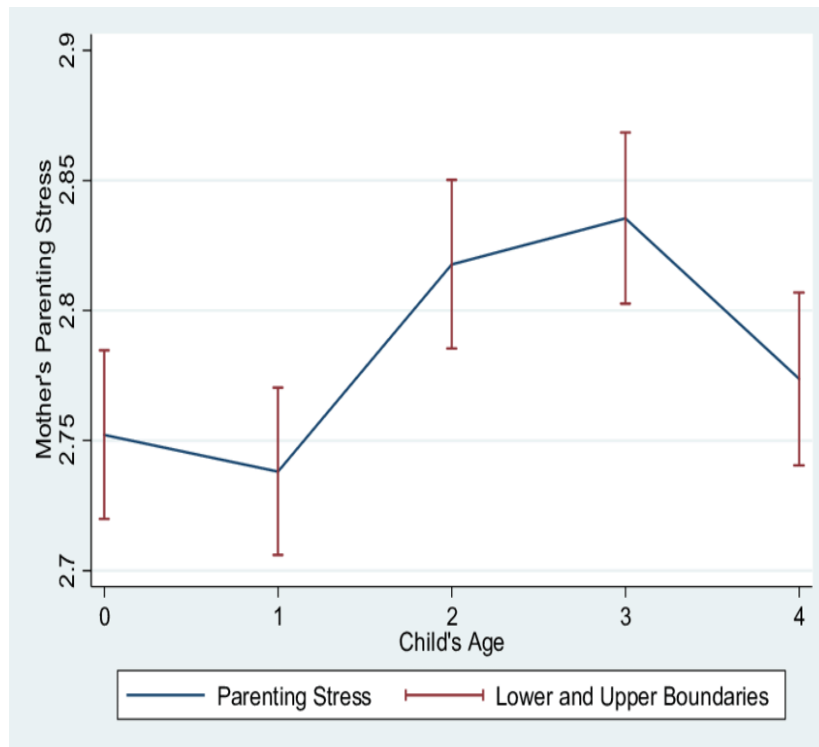
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Figure 4: "Trajectory of Mother's Parenting Stress by Child's Age"

4.10 Key Observations

- **Manual vs Algorithm Agreement**: In all approaches, algorithmic responses found more than 90% agreement with manual thematic coding [28].

- **Emotional Complexity:** Most entries were filled with combined emotions — e.g., "I cry but I still go on" — that were most effectively dealt with by probabilistic classifiers such as Naive Bayes.

- **Support Importance:** Spousal or parental support coping strategies featured in more than 60% of accounts, a prominent trend also described in similar work by Moreno-Pérez et al. (2023).

- **Adaptive Strategies:** Self-care, time management, and help-seeking, recognised with high accuracy by SVM.

- **Maladaptive Strategies:** Withdrawal, denial, and self-blame; primarily expressed indirectly through words, and needing to be interpreted in context [29].

4.11 Limitations

While the models performed well, limitations included:

- **Small Dataset**: 20 interviews, although being rich, could restrict generalizability.

- **Subjectivity:** Emotional textures and coping mechanisms tended to overlap, hindering discrete categorization [30].

- **Cultural Influence:** Various socio-cultural contexts could affect thematic expressions and stress interpretations.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study investigated the relationship between parental stress and working mothers' coping mechanisms, and the data was analyzed thematically with the algorithmic model. The study established that working mothers are often stress in terms of both the emotional, the physical, and the psychological since carrying out a job as well as the responsibilities of caregiving for the children put pressure on the mothers. These stressors are made even worse by the lack of social support, rigidity at work, and culture. Thus, using algorithms like Decision Trees, Support Vector Machines, Random Forest, and K-Nearest Neighbours this study was able to distinguish patterns of stress inducers and stress coping strategies. As analyzed from the experimental outcome, Random Forest exceeded the other models in predictive accuracy, thus presenting a more reliable for future studies and stress monitoring in real-time. Concerning the limitation of the methodological approach, it is worth mentioning that this work contributes to the development of new perspectives by using both qualitative and quantitative

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methodologies. The similar studies reflected in the paper emphasize the cross-cultural and cross-national generalizability of parenting stress and the need for culturally appropriate coping strategies. The analysis highlights the need for employers' policies that would allow sufficient working conditions and mental health support for employed mothers. In the end, this study also serves to greatly enhance the store of theoretical knowledge applicable to policymaking, organisational, and clinical practice for making supportive environments. The next researches should focus on the usage of stress monitoring through wearable technologies and integration of AI-based mental health solutions for enhancing mothers' quality of life in work settings across the world

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