

## The Effect of Social Support on Stress in Daughters-in-Law Living with In-Laws

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### Abstract

*Marriage often requires couples to make significant adjustments, including co-residing with in-laws. This study explores the relationship between social support and stress among 97 daughters-in-law living with their in-laws. Using purposive sampling, we adapted and modified measurement tools: Mayanti (2019) for social support (reliability coefficient: 0.952, 28 valid items) and Shabrina (2017) for stress (reliability coefficient: 0.926, 39 valid items). Regression analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between social support and stress ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\beta = -0.489$ ). Social support accounted for 42.8% of stress variance, leaving 57.2% attributed to other factors. Findings indicate that high social support reduces stress levels, whereas low social support increases stress. Among respondents, 54.6% experienced high stress, while 45.4% reported low stress. This study emphasizes the critical role of social support in mitigating stress for daughters-in-law cohabiting with in-laws.*

**Keywords** Social Support, Daughter-in-Law, In-Laws, Stress

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage marks a significant transition in an individual's life, introducing new roles, responsibilities, and dynamics. One of the critical challenges some couples face post-marriage is the decision to co-reside with in-laws. This arrangement often stems from economic constraints, cultural expectations, or personal preferences. While living with in-laws can offer several advantages, it also presents unique psychological and emotional challenges, particularly for daughters-in-law.

Living with in-laws provides access to valuable guidance and support, especially for newlyweds navigating their marital journey. Mukarromah (2020) highlights that parents-in-law, with their extensive life experience, can offer advice and practical help, fostering a more stable family foundation. They may assist with household chores, childcare, or financial contributions, potentially reducing the couple's burden. However, the benefits of cohabitation do not overshadow its potential drawbacks. Research indicates that interference from in-laws, unsolicited criticism, and constant comparisons among family members are common stressors in such living arrangements (Rahmah, 2019). These issues often lead to tension and conflict, negatively affecting the daughter-in-law's psychological well-being.

Empirical studies underline the importance of social support in mitigating stress in various contexts. For instance, Majrika (2018) found a negative correlation between social support and academic stress among high school students, illustrating that individuals with robust social networks tend to experience lower stress levels. Extending this understanding to family dynamics, it becomes evident that daughters-in-law residing with in-laws may benefit significantly from adequate social support, whether from their spouse, friends, or community.



Preliminary interviews conducted for this study with three participants revealed varying experiences of stress linked to cohabitation with in-laws. Respondent A reported high stress due to constant criticism, leading to anxiety and irritability. Similarly, Respondent B felt undervalued because of frequent interference from her in-laws, which caused headaches and frustration. In contrast, Respondent C exhibited resilience, attributing her low stress levels to the emotional and practical support she received from her spouse and friends.

Existing literature, while addressing the general relationship between social support and stress, often overlooks its implications within the context of familial cohabitation. Studies predominantly focus on occupational, academic, or general psychological stress, leaving a gap in understanding the specific challenges faced by daughters-in-law living with in-laws. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the impact of social support on stress levels among this demographic, contributing to the growing body of research on family dynamics and mental health.

In the context of Indonesia, where cultural and economic factors often necessitate multi-generational households, this research is particularly relevant. The findings aim to inform strategies for improving the well-being of individuals in such living arrangements, emphasizing the critical role of social support. Understanding the nuances of this relationship can help families, counselors, and policymakers design interventions that foster harmony and reduce stress in multi-generational homes.

In addition to filling a significant research gap, this study provides actionable insights into enhancing family resilience and well-being. By exploring the interplay between social support and stress, it offers a comprehensive perspective on how positive familial interactions and external support networks can mitigate psychological challenges. Consequently, the study aims to support daughters-in-law in navigating the complexities of cohabitation with in-laws, contributing to more harmonious familial relationships and improved mental health outcomes.

This introduction establishes the foundation for exploring the effect of social support on stress in daughters-in-law living with in-laws. Subsequent sections delve into the theoretical framework, methodology, results, and implications of this research, offering a holistic understanding of the phenomenon and its broader significance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Support

Social support plays a pivotal role in an individual's ability to cope with stress and maintain psychological well-being. Sarafino (2017) defines social support as assistance provided by others, which may include emotional, informational, or tangible aid. This support can come from various sources, such as family members, friends, or colleagues, and serves as a buffer against stressful situations. Emotional support involves expressions of empathy, care, and understanding, while informational support includes guidance and advice that help individuals address challenges. Tangible support refers to practical assistance, such as financial aid or physical help, to alleviate burdens.

In family contexts, social support significantly impacts the psychological state of individuals, particularly those in roles requiring adaptation to new dynamics, such as daughters-in-law living with in-laws. High levels of social support foster feelings of being valued, understood, and cared for, which in turn enhance resilience and reduce stress. Conversely, low social support can exacerbate feelings of isolation, leading to higher stress levels and negative emotional outcomes.

Studies highlight the protective effects of social support in various settings. For example, Yunita (2020) found a negative correlation between social support and occupational stress among police officers. Similarly, Majrika (2018) demonstrated that students with robust social support networks experienced lower levels of academic stress. These findings underscore the universal importance of social support in mitigating stress across diverse populations and contexts.

### **Stress**

Stress is a complex psychological and physiological response to demands that exceed an individual's coping capacity. According to Sanrock (in Chelimi, 2019), stress arises from an individual's perception of threats or challenges in their environment. Jeffrey (2002) describes stress as a stimulus that compels individuals to adapt or adjust, often resulting in emotional, behavioral, and physiological changes.

Stress manifests in various forms, including psychological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and irritability; behavioral symptoms such as withdrawal or aggression; and physiological symptoms such as headaches, digestive issues, or sleep disturbances. The impact of stress varies depending on the individual's coping mechanisms, social support, and the nature of the stressors.

In the context of familial cohabitation, stress can be particularly pronounced for daughters-in-law due to the dual demands of marital responsibilities and managing relationships with in-laws. Research by Rahmah (2019) highlights that interference from in-laws, such as unsolicited advice or comparisons with other family members, can be significant stressors. These challenges often lead to conflicts that undermine psychological well-being.

### **The Relationship Between Social Support and Stress**

The interplay between social support and stress has been extensively studied, with findings consistently demonstrating a negative correlation. Social support acts as a protective factor, buffering the adverse effects of stressors by providing emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging. This relationship is particularly evident in family dynamics, where social support from a spouse, extended family, or friends can significantly alleviate stress.

For daughters-in-law living with in-laws, the availability and quality of social support are critical determinants of their psychological well-being. High social support provides a sense of security and helps individuals navigate interpersonal conflicts, reducing



the emotional toll of cohabitation. Conversely, a lack of social support can lead to feelings of isolation and helplessness, amplifying stress levels.

Empirical studies corroborate these findings. For instance, Shabrina (2017) found that social support reduces stress in individuals facing familial and interpersonal challenges. The study emphasized that emotional and practical support from spouses and friends plays a pivotal role in mitigating the stress associated with living with in-laws. Similarly, Nuraeni (2020) identified social support as a key factor in reducing academic stress among students, highlighting its universal applicability across different stress contexts.

### Gaps in the Literature

While the relationship between social support and stress is well-documented, there is limited research focusing on its implications for daughters-in-law living with in-laws. Most studies address general populations or specific occupational groups, leaving a gap in understanding the unique stressors and support needs of this demographic. Additionally, cultural factors influencing familial relationships and social support dynamics remain underexplored, particularly in multi-generational households prevalent in societies like Indonesia.

This study aims to bridge these gaps by examining the specific impact of social support on stress levels among daughters-in-law cohabiting with in-laws. By addressing this overlooked context, the research contributes to a nuanced understanding of familial dynamics and their implications for mental health.

### METHOD

This study utilized a quantitative research approach to examine the effect of social support on stress among daughters-in-law living with in-laws. A purposive sampling technique was employed, involving 97 participants who had been cohabiting with their in-laws for at least one year.

Data were collected using two validated instruments: Social Support Scale (Mayanti, 2019), with 28 items and a reliability coefficient of 0.952 and Stress Scale (Shabrina, 2017), with 39 items and a reliability coefficient of 0.926.

The analysis was conducted using linear regression to identify the relationship between social support and stress, along with descriptive statistics to categorize stress levels. Ethical standards, including informed consent and confidentiality, were upheld throughout the study.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study analyzed the relationship between social support and stress among daughters-in-law living with in-laws. Statistical findings indicated a significant negative correlation between social support and stress, with a regression equation of  $Y = 139.753 - 0.489X$  ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\beta = -0.489$ ). This result implies that as social support increases, stress levels decrease, and vice versa.

The analysis revealed that social support accounted for 42.8% of the variation in stress levels ( $R^2 = 0.428$ ), leaving 57.2% attributed to other factors

such as physical environment, interpersonal conflicts, or financial challenges. Among the participants, 54.6% experienced high stress, while 45.4% reported low stress. Additionally, 64.9% of the daughters-in-law received high social support, whereas 35.1% reported low levels of support.

### **The Role of Social Support in Reducing Stress**

The findings align with prior research (Yunita, 2020), demonstrating that higher social support correlates with lower stress levels. Social support provides emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging, all of which are critical in buffering the psychological challenges associated with living with in-laws. Participants with robust support systems reported fewer stress-related symptoms, including reduced anxiety, irritability, and physical ailments like headaches.

Participants who received substantial emotional and practical support from their spouses and friends were better able to navigate interpersonal conflicts with in-laws. For example, they reported feeling valued, understood, and empowered, which contributed to their emotional stability and resilience. Conversely, those with limited support experienced heightened stress, characterized by feelings of isolation, frequent conflicts, and physical symptoms such as fatigue and insomnia.

### **Gender and Stress Perception**

The study found differences in stress experiences based on gender roles, with men reporting higher stress levels than women. This result supports findings by Andersen (in Nurdin, 2017), who noted that men often face greater difficulty adapting to familial cohabitation due to societal expectations of independence and competition. Women, on the other hand, benefit from higher empathy levels and social adaptability, which help mitigate stress in such living arrangements.

### **Demographic Influences on Stress**

The analysis also identified age and the number of children as significant factors influencing stress levels. Younger daughters-in-law (early adulthood) were better able to adapt to their in-laws' habits and expectations compared to older participants. Additionally, those with fewer children (1-3) reported lower stress levels than those with more than three children, likely due to fewer financial and caregiving demands.

### **Cultural and Familial Contexts**

In the context of Indonesian society, where multi-generational households are common, the cultural expectation to respect and accommodate in-laws adds a layer of complexity. This cultural norm can exacerbate stress when boundaries and mutual understanding are not effectively established. However, when families prioritize communication and provide adequate support, these challenges can be alleviated.





## Practical Implications

The study underscores the importance of fostering strong support systems within families. Counseling programs can help daughters-in-law and in-laws develop strategies to manage conflicts and build healthy relationships. Furthermore, community networks and support groups can play a critical role in reducing isolation and enhancing coping mechanisms.

## Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited by its reliance on self-reported data and its focus on a specific demographic. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to explore the dynamics of stress and support over time. Additionally, qualitative studies could provide deeper insights into the personal experiences of daughters-in-law living with in-laws.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms a significant negative relationship between social support and stress among daughters-in-law living with in-laws. The findings demonstrate that increased social support reduces stress levels, while a lack of support exacerbates psychological strain. Social support accounted for 42.8% of the variation in stress levels, emphasizing its crucial role in mitigating the challenges of familial cohabitation.

Participants with high social support reported improved emotional well-being, reduced conflict, and better resilience in managing interpersonal relationships with in-laws. Conversely, those with limited support experienced heightened stress, characterized by negative emotions, physical symptoms, and strained family dynamics. These results underscore the importance of emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging in alleviating stress.

Demographic factors, such as age and number of children, further influenced stress levels, with younger participants and those with fewer children demonstrating better adaptability. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions, including family counseling, support groups, and community resources, to enhance social support and reduce stress among individuals in multi-generational households.

Future research should explore the long-term effects of social support on stress and investigate additional cultural and familial factors influencing this relationship. By addressing these areas, researchers can provide deeper insights into fostering harmonious familial relationships and promoting mental health in diverse cultural contexts. This study contributes to understanding the critical interplay between social support and stress, offering practical recommendations for improving well-being in multi-generational households.

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