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EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF PERCEIVED SUPPORT SYSTEMS AMONG HOUSEWIVES

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Abstract:

Society often perceives housewives as a group with complex emotional and social demands, especially when societal expectations and economic pressures shape their daily experiences. Although they are central to family stability, limited attention has been given to understanding how they manage these challenges through the support systems available to them. The study aims to explore the perceived support systems of housewives and how these networks influence their daily functioning and overall well-being. Using a qualitative case study design, this study collected data from 20 full-time housewives in the Klang Valley through semi-structured interviews and analysed the findings using thematic analysis, supported by member checking and peer debriefing techniques. The results indicate that housewives' support systems comprise three key components, namely as nuclear family networks, extended family networks, and community networks. Support from spouses, children, and parents emerged as the most immediate and crucial source of emotional stability, while extended family members provided valuable assistance, particularly in childcare. Community relationships, including friendships and neighbour interactions, offered additional emotional and social resources, although some housewives reported experiencing isolation due to limited social engagement. Overall, the findings demonstrate that strong support systems help housewives navigate domestic responsibilities, enhance resilience, and maintain healthier psychological well-being. This study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of housewives lived experiences and underscores the importance of strengthening social support structures within families and communities. Future research is

recommended to expand the geographical scope and further explore differences across diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

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Introduction

In the current situation of the society nowadays, the decision to assume the role of a housewife or to pursue a professional career constitutes an autonomous and individualized choice for women. This aligns with Choudhury, Foroughi, and Larson (2021) views, who highlighted that the increasing openness of work arrangements, whether remote or in-person has created more flexible employment opportunities. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that some women with families choose to leave the workforce and become full-time housewives. As reported in a study by Ismail, Hassan and Ma'adan (2022), women living in urban areas often decide to stop working due to the high cost of childcare services, such as hiring domestic helpers or sending children to day care centers. This situation allows them to focus on caring for their children at home, consequently placing the household in the category of a single-breadwinner family.

However, this transition into a single-breadwinner arrangement also exposes housewives to certain societal perceptions that may not always be favourable, the social stigmas. These stigmas have occurred family residing in major cities, together with economic pressure. In this context, reliance on a single source of income can intensify a family's economic pressures, leading to the perception that a non-earning housewife constitutes an additional psychological burden. In some situations, negative perceptions such as being under serious stress, experiencing depression, burnout, or loneliness have also been widely reported in previous research (Diabaji, Durak, Senol-Durak et al., 2023; Karakose & Ulusoy, 2022). In other words, such perceptions contribute to the portrayal of housewives as individuals with a weak image, lacking healthy competitiveness and having limited potential in society.

As these negative psychological experiences have been widely documented, social support emerges as a critical factor that enables housewives to more effectively navigate and manage mental health challenges. In a local study by Ali, Jaris, Samsudin et al., (2025), it was reported that housewives in Malaysia are better able to manage mental health challenges such as

depression and anxiety when they receive strong social support. A growing body of research demonstrates that when housewives receive adequate support from their networks, they are more likely to experience enhanced wellbeing and a greater sense of meaning in their daily roles. In other words, supportive environments have been shown to strengthen psychological resilience, increase feelings of competence, and foster a sense of connectedness, which collectively contribute to a more positive and fulfilling quality of life (Ryan & Deci, 2020). These arguments could also be expanded to the housewives. In this regard, housewives who are embedded in strong support systems are better positioned to manage role-related stressors and maintain a healthier balance between personal, familial, and social expectations. Although previous studies have highlighted the role of social support in shaping the wellbeing of housewives, this area remains insufficiently explored within the local context. Therefore, this study aims to explore the social support perceived by local housewives.

Literature Review

In the context of well-being, an individual's involvement in relationships that provide meaning in life is an essential element, especially when it involves social support. For individuals who receive support from their social networks, this contributes positively to their emotional and physical well-being. A study by Luo, Ding, Bauman et al., (2020) found that individuals who are active within their social networks report a higher quality of life. Those who receive support are noted to have more positive outlooks, and this acts as a protective factor against negative perceptions of life. This highlights that subjective well-being does not rely solely on thoughts and emotions but is also influenced by the quality of social relationships.

As social relationships play a fundamental role in shaping an individual's well-being, the connections provide emotional grounding and a sense of belonging. Kopsov (2019) further asserts that human behaviour shifts according to the social environment, and one's ability to adapt to that environment is a crucial component of subjective well-being. In the context of housewives, social support whether from husbands, children, close family members, or the community serves as a foundation that helps them adjust, reduce stress, and enhance their sense of well-being. Therefore, the positivity of a housewives does not depend solely on internal aspects such as emotions and thoughts but is also strengthened through social involvement and stable support networks in their daily lives.

Since positive perception is influenced by both internal states and the quality of one's social relationships, previous studies have also highlighted the importance of this aspect in a person's life (Sulaiman et al., 2023; Voukelatou et al., 2021). For instance, the study conducted by Sulaiman et al. (2023) reported that although individuals may face life challenges, having meaningful relationships within their social networks can lead to more positive evaluations of their well-being. Respondents who perceived themselves as having support from significant members of their social network, such as friends, were found to experience greater positive value in their lives. In other words, individuals who hold positive perceptions of their life circumstances tend to exhibit higher levels of subjective well-being.

Meanwhile, a separate study by Hamid, Rashid and Ishak (2022) have examined the personal well-being of housewives in the context of community engagement. In that study, community involvement was assessed through interactions with others via social media platforms. Data obtained from ten informants through a focus group discussion revealed that the housewives maintained individual interactions with people outside their homes through social media.

Communication through platforms such as Facebook or WhatsApp with extended family members, friends, or the broader community helped them feel more positive about their own well-being. These uplifting interactions illustrate that social engagement can shape broader aspects of housewives' personal well-being.

In regards of social engagement, Hamid et al., (2022) study has identified that the aspect of perceived social support has led to tremendous benefits to the housewives, such as cognitive development, good well-being and act as a supplementary income generation. In this context, engagement in a broader context, such as social media activities appeared to contribute positively to the well-being of housewives. This included aspects such as positive emotions, healthy relationships with others, quality personal development, and, at the same time, contributing to family finances. In summary, the study by Hamid et al., (2022) offers a broader perspective on the well-being and social involvement of housewives, whether through physical or virtual means. In a smaller context, for example in a family setting, an international study conducted by Priya and Ahmad (2021). The study was found that housewives in India reported that one of the factors contributing to the greater happiness of the housewives was having spouses who assisted with domestic tasks. Spousal involvement in household chores was viewed as an important source of social support for housewives. In addition, with such assistance, housewives perceived that both partners shared responsibility within the household. Priya and Ahmad (2021) concluded that social support is a significant element in shaping housewives' perceptions of subjective well-being.

Although housewives are seen as the backbone of the family and their contributions are not underestimated, local past studies have rarely focused specifically on the social support they perceived from the networks. Instead, their involvement has often been captured merely as demographic data or used for comparison with working women (Lu, Yan & Jones et al., 2023; Priya & Ahmad, 2021). Nevertheless, some researchers have adopted a different perspective by focusing on positive aspects of the housewife group, such as Adnan and Sukor (2023) and Hamid et al. (2022). This aligns with Marchesi (2021) view that housewives are a group with potential, talent, and skills to contribute to society. Hence, a study of housewives is indeed valuable to explore, particularly from the standpoint of the social support present within this group.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative method with a case study design. Data collection was conducted in the Klang Valley, and participants were chosen through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria required participants to be (i) women who are full-time housewives and (ii) between 20 and 60 years old. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data, carried out either face-to-face or online depending on participants' preferences. An interview protocol was utilized to maintain consistency and ensure thorough exploration of the topics. A pilot study involving two housewives was conducted in October 2024 in Selangor. The main phase of data collection occurred from November 2024 to February 2025, involving 20 housewives. The interview data were analyzed through thematic analysis. To strengthen the credibility of the findings, two validation techniques were implemented which were member checking and peer debriefing.

Findings

A total of 20 informants who were housewives participated in the research interviews, with the majority being Malay and one being Chinese. All informants were Muslim, with ages ranging from 32 to 46 years. In terms of educational background, most of the informants held higher academic qualification in various fields such as biotechnology, medicine, mechatronics, and *shariah*. The number of children among the informants ranged from one to five. For confidentiality purposes, the names of the informants in this article have been replaced with Informant 1 to Informant 20, with their real names altered accordingly. In this analysis, although all informants contributed to the analysis, not all narratives demonstrated the same level of depth or relevance to specific themes. Consequently, quotations with stronger explanatory value were prioritised.

In this study, the support system of housewives refers to the network of individuals and social relationships that assist the informants in managing their daily lives. These includes household responsibilities, childcare, and emotional support. Based on the interview, the support system among the housewives comprises three main sub-themes: (i) nuclear family networks, (ii) extended family networks, and (iii) community networks.

For the sub-theme of the nuclear family network, it refers to the support received from informants' immediate family members such as spouses, parents, and children. In this study, the housewives shared that they depend on their nuclear family for sharing feelings, seeking advice, and expressing daily concerns. For Informant 11, her relationship with her family is very close, where she frequently talks about everything that happens within the household.

"...My family and I are very close. Whatever it is, I will always share the information with everyone. Everyone generally knows what is happening in the family..." (Informant 11)

However, it is interesting to note that not all informants reported positive experiences regarding the support received from their families, especially those whose mothers are working women. In this study, some informants shared similar experiences when it came to family support. This is due to the some of personal reasons such as their mother is not a housewife, but a career women. In the interview, the Informant 5 state that:

"...Like my mother, she is a career woman. At that time, she was like, 'Are you sure you want to become a housewife?' Because in her view, women need to have their own income..." (Informant 5)

The second sub-theme referring to the extended family network, this theme encompasses support from relatives and in-laws. For these housewives, the strong relationships with extended family members enable them to obtain assistance such as childcare when they are involved in external activities or specific programs. This was expressed by Informant 19:

"...My relationship with my parents and my husband's parents is good. They are always there to help me. We are close and often go on holidays together..." (Informant 19)

Finally, the community sub-theme relates to the social interactions of the housewives in this study with their friends and neighbours. Some housewives have close relationships with neighbours to the point that they can freely enter each other's homes. There are also housewives

who feel comfortable sharing personal problems with friends. For example, Informant 19 and Informant 20 stated:

“...There are a few neighbours who are very close to me and my children. We are close enough that we can go in and out of each other’s houses just like that...” (Informant 19)

“...If I’m feeling unwell, I tell my friends, not my family. Usually, I go to my friends. I usually don’t share problems with my family, only happy things...” (Informant 20)

However, it is worth to mentioned that some informants in this study also shared that they feel isolated due to limited social interaction (Informant 1, Informant 10, Informant 15, and Informant 18). For instance, Informant 1 admitted that she has no close friends and similarly, Informant 10 mentioned that she is not very close to her neighbours. She has no issue greeting them but does not prefer engaging in more extensive conversations:

“...For me, I don’t have close friends. The friends I do have are busy with their own lives...” (Informant 1)

“...I’m the type who is not very open to sharing things with others. If I meet my neighbours, I greet them. But I’m not the type who sits around and chats like that...” (Informant 10)

In summary, the support system of housewives refers to the network of individuals and social relationships that help them navigate daily life, including managing the household, caring for children, and receiving emotional support. Table 1 illustrates the main theme, sub-themes, and illustrative accounts of informants regarding perceived support systems among housewives.

Table 1: Theme And Sub-Theme for Perceived Support Systems Among Housewives

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Informants	Illustrative Descriptions
Perceived Support Systems	Nuclear Family Network	Informant 5, Informant 11, Informant 19	Support from immediate family members, including spouses, parents, and children, emerged as a primary source of emotional stability. Informant 11 described close family relationships characterised by frequent sharing and open communication. Informant 19 reported positive family support that contributed to emotional well-being. However, Informant 5 experienced limited emotional support due to differing perspectives on the role of full-time housewives, particularly from a career-oriented mother.
	Extended Family Network	Informant 19	Extended family members, such as parents and in-laws, provided practical and emotional support. Informant 19 highlighted assistance with childcare and shared family activities, which

			strengthened familial bonds and facilitated participation in activities outside the home.
	Community Network (Positive Experiences)	Informant 19, Informant 20	Community relationships, including friendships and neighbour interactions, served as additional sources of emotional and social support. Informant 19 reported close relationships with neighbours, allowing frequent and informal interactions. Informant 20 preferred sharing personal concerns with friends rather than family members, indicating friends as a key emotional support system.
	Community Network (Limited Experiences)	Informant 1, Informant 10, Informant 15, Informant 18	Some informants reported limited social interaction within their communities, resulting in feelings of isolation. Informant 1 indicated a lack of close friendships, while Informant 10 maintained only surface-level interactions with neighbours. Similar experiences were reported by Informants 15 and 18, reflecting constraints in perceived community support.

The support system identified in this study consists of three main sub-themes: nuclear family networks, extended family networks, and community networks. Taken together, the findings suggest that perceived support systems play a central role in shaping housewives' daily experiences. These support networks form an important foundation for understanding their emotional adjustment and overall well-being.

Discussion on the Result

The findings from the interviews on the subjective well-being experiences of housewives indicate that their support system refers to the network of individuals and social relationships that play a role in supporting them in their daily lives. This includes aspects such as household management, childcare, and emotional well-being. Based on the study's results, this theme comprises three main sub-themes: nuclear family networks, extended family networks, and community networks. The sub-theme of the nuclear family network refers to support obtained from immediate family members such as spouses, children, and parents. Most housewives stated that they rely on their nuclear family to share feelings, seek advice, and express the stress or challenges they face. Close relationships with spouses and children were described as an important source of emotional support, especially in balancing the continuous pressures of domestic responsibilities (Mas'udah 2022). In addition, many participants highlighted that the presence of a supportive spouse encourages better coping strategies when facing overwhelming household duties. Children also play a significant role by offering companionship, helping with small chores, and providing moments of joy that uplift emotional well-being. A few informants highlighted that family practices such as sharing news and information about family well-being strengthen bonding and reduce feelings of isolation. Overall, these insights show that the

nuclear family continues to serve as the most immediate and dependable support system in navigating the emotional demands of daily life.

Meanwhile, the extended family aspect encompasses support from relatives and in-laws. Housewives with strong ties to their extended family indicated that they were able to receive assistance such as childcare when they were involved in outside activities or participating in certain programs. In addition to practical support, these close relationships also contribute to emotional well-being through social interactions and togetherness in family-related activities such as vacations or attending family events. According to Zaimah, Abdullah and Sukimi (2021), support from family members is essential in maintaining the functioning of a family unit. Furthermore, informants in this study agreed that close relationships with extended family networks are seen as a positive form of support. As stated by Amran, Saari and Talhah (2025), the challenges experienced by the housewives underscore the importance of extended family support. The support gained by these housewives may be reflected by the support from relatives and in-laws for childcare assistance, emotional encouragement, and social connectedness during demanding phases of their domestic roles. Collectively, past studies and the informants' views highlight that extended family support through childcare assistance, emotional encouragement, and social connectedness is essential for sustaining family functioning and helping housewives navigate the challenges of their domestic roles.

However, not all experiences related to family networks were positive. Some housewives faced limitations in terms of emotional support or understanding from family members, particularly when their mothers were working women with differing views on the role of full-time housewives. In this study, it was found that support systems from immediate family members are not necessarily uniform and may be influenced by background factors and personal expectations regarding women's roles. This situation may occur due to differing opinions and stigma faced by housewives, especially those with highly educated family members. Stigma toward highly educated women who choose to become housewives has also been reported in previous studies (Amran et al., 2021). Moreover, the image of housewives is often linked to exhaustion, burnout, and lack of personal development, which contributes to a negative societal perception of this group (Dibaji et al., 2023; Karakose & Ulusoy 2022). Overall, negative perceptions toward housewives could be driven by differing opinions within highly educated families, stigma surrounding educated women who choose full-time domestic roles. Moreover, the common associations of housewifery with exhaustion, burnout, and limited personal growth reported from the previous studies continue to shape the societal challenges faced by this group.

Finally, within this theme, the community network refers to the social relationships' housewives have with friends and neighbours in their residential areas. These relationships play an important role in providing emotional and social support beyond the family structure. Some housewives reported having very close relationships with neighbours, allowing them to freely enter each other's homes, whereas others preferred to share their problems with friends rather than family members, especially when it involved personal matters. However, there were also housewives who reported limited social interaction, whether due to having no close friends, peers being busy, or personal tendencies to avoid excessive openness in social interactions. This situation caused some housewives to feel isolated and experience constraints in social support, which may indirectly affect their emotional well-being. Social isolation among housewives was also discussed by Kaplan (2021), who suggested that focusing solely on the needs of family members can lead to severe exhaustion within this group. Overall, the support

system plays an essential role in shaping the subjective well-being of housewives. Although the form and level of support received vary among individuals, these aspects play a significant role in helping housewives managing their stress and balancing their daily responsibilities.

Conclusion

This study explored the perceived support systems among housewives in the Klang Valley and highlights the important role of social networks in shaping their daily experiences and well-being. The findings indicate that housewives' support systems are primarily embedded within nuclear family, extended family, and community networks, each contributing differently to emotional, practical, and social support. Support from immediate family members emerged as the most crucial source of emotional stability, while extended family networks provided valuable assistance, particularly in childcare and shared responsibilities. Community relationships further complemented these support systems by offering social connection, although limited engagement in some cases led to feelings of isolation. Overall, the presence of strong and accessible support networks enabled housewives to better manage domestic demands and maintain healthier psychological well-being. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening family and community-based support structures to enhance the quality of life among housewives.

In terms of limitations, this study draws its data exclusively from housewives residing in the Klang Valley. Housewives in other regions may experience different community structures, educational levels, cultural norms, and opportunities for volunteer participation. To address this limitation, future research may widen the geographical scope by including housewives from various states in Malaysia, such as those in rural, suburban, and less developed areas. This broader coverage allows for comparisons across diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds.

Geographical context also plays a role in shaping social support systems and community networks that influence involvement in volunteerism. Comparative studies between urban and rural settings, for instance, may provide deeper understanding of differences in volunteer participation. Through such examinations, future research can determine whether factors such as local norms exert a significant influence on housewives' motivation and subjective well-being.

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