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Understanding Parenting Self-Efficacy among Primipara Mothers: An Integrative Review of Experiences, Social Support, and Work-Life Balance

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Abstract

Parenting self-efficacy refers to a parent's belief in their ability to successfully perform parenting roles and responsibilities. For primipara mothers, the transition to motherhood involves major emotional, physical, and social adjustments that can influence confidence in caring for an infant. This integrative review synthesises evidence on parenting self-efficacy among primiparous mothers, with a specific focus on maternal experiences, social support, and work-life balance. Previous studies have shown that maternal mental health, self-confidence in childcare skills,

support from family and partners, and work-related stressors are determinants of parenting self-efficacy. Primipara mothers commonly experience confusion, stress, and emotional distress in the early postpartum period. These difficulties are particularly exacerbated when there is inadequate support or when returning to paid work. At the same time, parental confidence and maternal well-being are clearly enhanced when social and workplace support is available. This study highlights the need to strengthen support systems.

Keywords: Parenting Self-Efficacy, Primipara Mothers, Social Support, Work-Life Balance

Introduction

The transition to motherhood is considered a very important developmental stage in a woman's life. This transition is marked not only by changes in physical, psychological, and health conditions, but also by changes in emotional experiences, social relationships, and daily life responsibilities. In particular, the mother-child relationship and interpersonal relationships take on a new shape during this stage. For primipara mothers, this transition often brings with it feelings of excitement, uncertainty, and self-doubt as they actively learn new caregiving skills, new demands, and challenges, and adjust to the maternal role. Parental self-efficacy is widely described as an important psychological factor that influences how mothers perceive and manage their new responsibilities towards their child. (Seetharaman *et al.*, 2022) [8].

Parenting self-efficacy is generally defined as a key factor in parents' confidence in their ability to successfully perform parenting behaviours or tasks and positively influence their child's health and development. Studies consistently show that mothers with higher parenting self-efficacy report better emotional adjustment, less parenting stress, greater involvement, and more positive caregiving behaviours. In contrast, low parental self-efficacy was significantly associated with increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, and difficulties adjusting to the demands of early motherhood (Tognasso *et al.*, 2022; Saether *et al.*, 2023) [10, 7].

Primipara motherhood is often described as a challenging time for mothers, especially in the months following childbirth. Compared to many mothers, they report feeling inadequately prepared for childcare, despite having received prenatal information. Difficulties related to feeding, soothing, sleep routines, and understanding infant cues are commonly reported to negatively impact maternal mental health and the mother-infant relationship, and they may reduce maternal confidence (Huang *et al.*, 2022; Cao *et al.*, 2023) [5, 3]. Furthermore, the emotional challenges of new motherhood, such as stress, fatigue, insomnia, and mood disturbances, further affect mothers' perceptions of their parenting abilities (Xue *et al.*, 2021) [11].

Having strong social support is crucial for shaping how confident parents feel about their abilities during this time. Support from partners, family, friends, coworkers, community groups, and healthcare professionals offers emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and guidance, which all boost a mother's confidence and overall well-being. Research shows that support from a partner and positive involvement from family members are closely linked to higher parenting self-efficacy. Conversely,

the absence of adequate support may result in heightened stress levels and diminished self-esteem among parents, impacting their psychological and physical health (Fierloos *et al.*, 2023; Arimoto & Tadaka, 2023) [4, 2]. In cultures that prioritize family, having the extended family's backing really helps with emotional, social, and psychological well-being, though sometimes conflicting advice or expectations can raise stress levels for mothers.

Furthermore, working mothers who are the primary caregivers of their children experience greater mental and physical stress compared to mothers who do not have those responsibilities. Such unique difficulties are important factors that directly and indirectly affect parenting self-efficacy. In a family-centred cultural environment, the support of extended family contributes greatly to mothers' emotional, social, and psychological well-being. As research results showed, long working hours and inflexible work schedules, coupled with a lack of adequate family or workplace support, negatively impact mothers' overall well-being. Such environments are key factors that reduce mothers' confidence in their abilities to effectively carry out parenting responsibilities (Olivieri *et al.*, 2024; Song *et al.*, 2022) [6, 9].

Accordingly, although a growing body of literature has examined parental self-efficacy, the aim of this study was to expand the literature by examining how findings may spread across different disciplines and study designs. Many women return to work within a short period after childbirth, making it difficult to balance professional and family responsibilities. Studies indicate that long work hours, inflexible job schedules, and inadequate support systems can negatively impact maternal well-being and lower confidence in parenting abilities (Seetharaman *et al.*, 2022) [8].

Conceptual Understanding of Parenting Self-Efficacy

The concept of parental self-efficacy is based on the belief that parents have in their own ability to successfully fulfill specific responsibilities and tasks assigned to them. This belief is an important component of overall self-efficacy. It refers to the degree to which parents feel confident in the parenting environment, in caring for their children appropriately, in meeting their basic and emotional needs, and in successfully completing daily parenting tasks. It's clear from reviews of parenting self-efficacy tools that this idea is quite complex, involving emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and social factors (Seetharaman *et al.*, 2022) [8].

Research shows that how parents perceive themselves has a bigger impact on parenting self-efficacy than what they can objectively measure about their skills. For instance, mothers might feel either confident or uncertain about their parenting abilities, regardless of their actual competence. These feelings can greatly influence how they manage their emotions and interact with their children (Saether *et al.*, 2023) [7]. Key elements of parental self-efficacy often include feeling successful in everyday caregiving tasks and having the confidence to solve problems (Tognasso *et al.*, 2022) [10].

Existing literature emphasizes that parental personal characteristics, family and social environment, and child-related factors are all deeply interconnected. Within this comprehensive system, parental self-efficacy is shaped by the influence of external pressures, maternal expectations, and available support systems (Seetharaman *et al.*, 2022) [8]. This comprehensive perspective is particularly relevant for

first-time mothers, who are simultaneously learning parenting skills and reshaping their personal and social identities.

Experiences of Primipara Mothers

Primipara motherhood is commonly described as an emotionally intense and demanding phase during this period. Evidence from several studies suggests that first-time mothers experience a combination of emotions, including happiness, anxiety, fear, and self-doubt, particularly during the early postpartum phase (Huang *et al.*, 2022; Saether *et al.*, 2023) [5, 7]. Many mothers express ongoing concerns about whether they are adequately meeting their children's needs. In particular, there is growing concern about their children's feeding routines, daily care, sleep routines, and whether they are responding appropriately to their sweet or quiet behaviors.

It's pretty common for first-time moms to experience parenting stress, and that stress is closely linked to how confident they feel in their parenting abilities. Mothers experiencing elevated stress levels tend to report lower confidence in their parenting role (Tognasso *et al.*, 2022) [10]. Emotional stress, lack of proper sleep, and constant caregiving responsibilities contribute substantially to feelings of inadequacy, particularly in situations where reassurance or guidance is insufficient.

Evidence from research conducted during extraordinary circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, indicates that external stressors further reduce parenting self-confidence. Studies have shown that during the lockdown period, the lack of easy access to social support and health services has led to a decrease in self-confidence among first-time parents, both mothers and fathers (Xue *et al.*, 2021) [11]. This situation highlights the heightened vulnerability of first-time mothers to stress arising from external factors. In contrast, existing research indicates that parenting confidence improves as mothers gain experience and receive positive feedback. Engaging in daily caregiving activities and building emotional connections with infants strengthens self-confidence over time (Cao *et al.*, 2023) [3]. These observations highlight parenting self-efficacy as a developmental and support-dependent process.

Role of Social Support

According to the literature, social support plays an important role in shaping parenting self-efficacy among first-time mothers. Support from partners, family, colleagues, friends, and health professionals provides emotional support, practical help with daily life, and positive feedback that validates mothers' efforts (Fierloos *et al.*, 2023) [4].

Partner support has been identified and described as being the most significant in influencing parental self-efficacy. Mothers who perceive their partners as emotionally supportive and involved in childcare activities demonstrate greater self-confidence and report lower parenting stress, with a noticeable reduction in daily routine-related stress (Song *et al.*, 2022) [9]. Shared caregiving responsibilities lessen the overall burden and help mothers feel less isolated, less overwhelmed, and less monotonous in their parenting experience.

Research frequently addresses the role of family support from extended family members in shaping maternal experiences. Although positive family involvement can strengthen maternal confidence, over-involvement or

contradictory advice may contribute to increased stress and reduced self-efficacy (Arimoto & Tadaka, 2023) [2]. Based on the findings, it is emphasized that supportive, understanding, and non-judgmental encouragement is more important than restrictive or blaming approaches.

Research evidence indicates that professional support provided by healthcare providers plays a key role in shaping and strengthening mothers' confidence in early motherhood. Clear guidance, reassurance, and respectful communication from nurses and midwives assist mothers in feeling more confident and capable of caring for their infants (Seetharaman *et al.*, 2022; Huang *et al.*, 2022) [8, 5].

Work–Life Balance and Parenting Self-Efficacy

For many primipara mothers, maintaining a balance between work and family life is a major challenge that can affect their overall well-being. Evidence consistently shows that working mothers experience work–family conflict, time constraints, and fatigue, which negatively affect emotional well-being, self-esteem, and parenting self-efficacy, often resulting in competing and conflicting demands (Olivieri *et al.*, 2024) [6].

Work-related stress, caused by long working hours, high workloads, inflexible work schedules, and lack of adequate workplace support, significantly reduce parenting stress and self-confidence (Song *et al.*, 2022) [9]. Because of this, many mothers who are trying to balance professional responsibilities, family life, and caregiving expectations report experiencing feelings of guilt, mood swings, and behavioral changes, while also facing increased emotional burden and distress.

According to research evidence, adequate workplace support, flexible work arrangements, and social support improve work-life balance. Financial stability, professional identity, family recognition, and social connections developed at work strengthen one's self-esteem and make work a meaningful experience. Studies indicate that such experiences indirectly support the development of parental confidence (Apriani & Risnawaty, 2020) [1]. Flexible work arrangements and supportive organizational cultures have been repeatedly associated with better work-life balance and higher parenting overall well-being and self-efficacy (Olivieri *et al.*, 2024) [6].

These findings clearly show that work-life balance, job satisfaction, and work engagement act as a moderating factor rather than a purely negative influence. The quality of workplace support determines whether employment becomes a factor that causes additional stress for first-time mothers or an empowering experience for them. In this context, this study will provide valuable insights into understanding mothers' experiences.

Measurement of Parenting Self-Efficacy

A range of instruments has been developed to assess parenting self-efficacy and related plans among parents of infants and young children, with particular emphasis on parenting comparison. Reviews of these studies indicate that, despite wide variation in focus, structure, and scoring approaches, these tools are useful for early identification and timely intervention, thereby helping to prevent or minimize adverse outcomes (Seetharaman *et al.*, 2022) [8]. Most of these instruments rely primarily on self-report-based measures to assess self-confidence, emotion regulation,

problem-solving skills, and perceived competence of individuals in care-related tasks.

Some instruments primarily assess parental beliefs and emotions, while others broaden their focus to include social support, home environment, management and coping practices, behavior management strategies, and child behavior. The diversity of these tools reflects the complex and multidimensional nature of parental self-efficacy and its direct association with parental knowledge and child outcomes, although it also presents challenges in comparing results across studies (Saether *et al.*, 2023) [7].

Among the various measurement criteria, cultural beliefs, practices, and language use are considered particularly important. Instruments that adopt neutral and inclusive language are more likely to recognize diversity across family structures and social roles, and to affirm individuals of all genders (Seetharaman *et al.*, 2022) [8]. Accurate measurement is therefore essential to clearly identify mothers at risk of low parenting self-efficacy and to evaluate the effectiveness of supportive interventions as a mediating factor.

Table 1: Factors Influencing Parenting Self-Efficacy Among Primipara Mothers (Derived from Reviewed Studies)

Domain	Key Influencing Factors
Maternal factors	Emotional well-being, stress levels, sleep quality, perceived competence
Family support	Partner involvement, extended family support, and quality of relationships
Social support	Peer support, healthcare guidance, community resources
Work-related factors	Workload, flexibility, workplace support
Environmental context	Access to services, social isolation, and external stressors

Impact of Parenting Self-Efficacy on Maternal and Child Outcomes

Research evidence demonstrates that parental self-efficacy has a significant impact on the mother's psychological well-being and the child's developmental and behavioral outcomes. Mothers with higher levels of self-efficacy report experiencing less parenting stress and better emotional adjustment in the postpartum period (Tognasso *et al.*, 2022) [10]. Increased confidence in childcare helps mothers manage daily challenges calmly and in a planned manner, thereby reducing emotional stress and helplessness.

Studies show a clear relationship between parenting self-efficacy and maternal mental health. Lower self-efficacy is linked with higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, particularly among primipara mothers who do not receive enough emotional or social support (Huang *et al.*, 2022; Saether *et al.*, 2023) [5, 7]. Research shows that when mothers confidently assume their role as parents, they have better mental health and greater satisfaction with motherhood (Arimoto & Tadaka, 2023) [2].

In addition, parental self-efficacy serves as a key factor shaping parenting behaviors and mother-child interactions. Mothers with higher confidence are more likely to engage in responsive caregiving, show emotional sensitivity, and feel more comfortable handling infant distress (Cao *et al.*, 2023) [3]. These behaviors contribute to positive early bonding experiences and support healthy child development. Low parenting self-efficacy may lead mothers to avoid caregiving

tasks, show inconsistency in care, or feel easily frustrated while handling infant needs (Seetharaman *et al.*, 2022) [8]. Research also shows that parenting self-efficacy acts as a protective factor in stressful situations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, parents with higher self-efficacy were better able to cope and control their emotions than those with low confidence (Xue *et al.*, 2021) [11]. This underlines the importance of improving parenting self-efficacy as part of maternal support programmes.

Table 2: Maternal and Child Outcomes Associated with Parenting Self-Efficacy

Level of Parenting Self-Efficacy	Maternal Outcomes	Child-Related Outcomes
High	Lower parenting stress, better emotional well-being, greater satisfaction with motherhood	More responsive caregiving, positive early bonding
Moderate	Occasional stress, gradual adaptation to motherhood	Adequate caregiving and interaction
Low	High stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion	Increased caregiving difficulties, less confident maternal responses

Implications for Practice and Policy

According to several reviews, maternal health practice and policy have significant relevance for planning. Healthcare professionals are in a strong position to support parenting self-efficacy in primipara mothers. Antenatal and postnatal services should give equal importance to emotional support, confidence-building, and practical caregiving skills (Seetharaman *et al.*, 2022) [8].

This approach helps to accurately identify mothers who may benefit from additional support, for example, by implementing routine assessments for parental stress and low self-esteem during postnatal check-ups. Previous research suggests that providing mothers with appropriate guidance, reassurance, and opportunities to share their concerns can improve self-esteem (Huang *et al.*, 2022) [5]. Furthermore, another study suggests that community-based peer support initiatives can reduce feelings of isolation and help transform the challenges of early motherhood into common and acceptable experiences (Sedhar *et al.*, 2023).

From a policy perspective, supportive workplace practices are essential to enhance parenting self-efficacy among working mothers. Flexible work arrangements, adequate maternity leave, and understanding supervisors can help mothers balance work and family responsibilities more effectively (Song *et al.*, 2022; Olivieri *et al.*, 2024) [9, 6]. It clearly shows that policies that recognize women's dual roles as caregivers and workers can reduce role conflict and improve maternal well-being.

We clearly realize that family, peer, friend, and relative interventions play an important role in maternal support. Which research suggests that encouraging partners to actively participate in childcare and share caregiving responsibilities can reduce maternal stress and improve trust in parenting (Fierloos *et al.*, 2023) [4]. Educational programs targeted at families can help create supportive home environments and positive maternal experiences.

Conclusion

Parenting self-efficacy is an important psychological strength for primipara mothers during the transition to

motherhood. This integrative review shows that maternal experiences, social support, and work-life balance are closely linked factors that influence parenting self-efficacy. Many first-time mothers face emotional difficulties, role strain, and uncertainty, especially when adequate support is not available. At the same time, supportive family relationships, positive healthcare interactions, and flexible workplace environments can significantly enhance maternal confidence. Strengthening parenting self-efficacy through family-centred care, community support, and supportive policies may improve maternal well-being and promote healthier early parenting experiences. Continued attention to this area is essential for supporting mothers and infants during the critical early years of life.

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