

Family Harmony in the COVID-19 Pandemic among Housewives in Malang

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic spreads quickly and affects various aspects of human life, one of which is family life. This study aims to describe family harmony, especially for housewives accompanying their children in distance learning. This study uses samples from a group of housewives in Malang. The family harmony scale was used to collect information about family harmony, while the interviews were used to find the factors that promote and hamper family harmony. The data is analyzed by a mixed-method. The results showed that the career housewives did not experience a significant negative effect from the pandemic. The promoting factors involve good communication, appreciation, acceptance of strengths and weaknesses, understanding the wills of family members, open communication and supporting among family members. The hampering factors are poor communication, lack of quality of time, poor of economy, selfishness, emotional acts, and low awareness and sensibility to the people in the workplace and the neighbourhood. This research results could be used to facilitate housewife to manage their family after COVID-19 pandemic to create more harmony family.

Keywords: Family Harmony, Housewives, Pandemic, Covid 19

INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is a threatening situation for major humans in preserve their existence from the uncertainty of outbreak pandemic will end. Since being discovered in December 2019, new variants have emerged and spread rapidly because of their nature that is easily transmitted, infects, mutates, and attacks various physiological functions (Sanche *et al.*, 2020). This wave caused significant changes in various aspects of human life including health, economy, education, and social. Almost all the mobility of people from various regions that previously required them to gather in one place is now starting to be reduced; workers complete assignments from home, students and teachers conduct distance learning (online), and face-to-face social interaction between individuals is also limited. The situation that has changed suddenly since the first outbreak of this virus affects human behavior patterns in adapting and managing different routines than before. This condition is called Lazarus & Folkman (1984) as a major trauma that has an impact on all humans in various parts of the world.

Most of the activities carried out at home can cause boredom and disrupt harmonious relationships between individuals. Whereas harmony is an essential aspect in maintaining family harmony when a social unit gathers together and spends a lot of time in a relatively long period of time (Wang & Ruan, 2023). Harmonization should be the responsibility of all parties who are part of a group because harmony is a description of the pattern of relationships between individuals in social groups as well as their social context (Fave, 2014). Literally, harmony comes from the Latin *harmonia* which means together, get along, and at peace. Java as part of Indonesian culture was paired with the terms *tentrem* and *rukun* (get along). This is what psychologists later used as an approach in

explaining individual interactions in increasing happiness and well-being, especially in positive psychology (Chen, 2009).

Consistent with the dynamics of human life, harmonization can be hampered by some disturbances from both internal and external factors, including the current pandemic situation. Disruption of harmony during a pandemic can be viewed from two perspectives, namely intrapersonal and interpersonal. Internal conditions of the mind, psyche and body are essential for individuals to maintain harmonization in the context of intrapersonal relationships. The relationship between the three indicates the importance of fulfilling primary needs as the main thing, such as food consumption in providing a source of energy and functioning of body and mental organs to form a good immune system. In addition, harmonizing psychological conditions is also very important in communicating between wants and needs, hopes and realities, as well as other internal impulses that may conflict with each other in an uncertain pandemic situation.

The systematic review and meta-analysis study conducted by Salari *et al.* (2020) shows that the COVID-19 pandemic causes a number of physical and mental disorders among different individuals and communities. This can be caused by factors that have the potential to rise conflict and have an impact on decreasing harmonization, such as increasing unemployment due to layoffs, boredom due to working from home, inability and boredom of parents in accompanying children during online learning, and feelings of loneliness or other negative emotions when limiting direct social interaction or during quarantine (Salari *et al.*, 2020; Goodwin *et al.*, 2020).

Harmonization in the family plays an important role in improving and maintaining relationships between family members in the pandemic situation that require an adjustment or adaptation and flexibility in dealing with tense situations. This can be strength and psychological capital in establishing good communication between members, supporting each other for improving the quality of human resources, and forming positive characters for each individual in establishing good relationships. Kuswanti, Munadhil, Zainal & Oktarian (2020) demonstrate a family communication management model that is ideally realized by every family member, whether father, mother, or child during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The family as a system and family members as a sub-system are at risk of experiencing pressures in dealing with new situations and changes that occur in the surrounding environment. Every new experience must be accompanied by pressures, therefore not all families will be ready to deal with changes, new experiences and new situations because it is synonymous with pressure (Maddi, 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic that impinge Indonesia in early 2020 and continues to spread to all countries in the world until now has brought families and family members to a relatively stressful situation. The tense and scary condition experienced by almost all humans in this world is described by Lazarus (1999) as psychological stress. Although in general humans experience stress, personality tendencies as individual differences have a different impact on mental and physical health and the condition of their family harmony.

Families have psychological dynamics in dealing with stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Each family with its various characteristics and potentials shows unique dynamics, especially in perceiving the COVID-19 pandemic as a stressor, although almost all perceive it as a source of stress, but with different strengths and intensities. Therefore, the views and ideas presented by Lazarus & Folkman (1984) regarding the dynamics of family and individual psychological stress are very important to (1) describe the condition of the family in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and (2) identify the promoting and hampering factors that affect family harmony in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Families and individuals in it during the pandemic, will not be able to avoid pressure and tense conditions (person-environment relationship). When facing this situation, families and individuals will carry out an appraisal of the potential dangers and losses caused by the pandemic situation and the availability of their resources (appraisal). The type and quality of their appraisal will have an impact on emotional reactions, such as sadness, anger, happiness, and so on (specific emotion) and opportunities to take action to resolve the potential problems of family life that arise as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (coping). These three things determine whether the families or individuals in it will experience certain physical health disorders (specific pattern of physiological disturbance) or infected COVID-19 (specific illness) or vice versa.

Family harmony during a Covid 19 pandemic is largely determined by the ability of the individuals in it to respond to the existing situation (Rozgonjuk *et al.*, 2022). Kavikondala *et al.* (2016) defines family harmony as a relationship between individuals that are closely related, full of closeness, and the existence of cooperation and mutual benefits. This relationship is characterized by 1) communication, 2) conflict resolution, 3) forbearance, 4) identity, and 5) quality time. These are indicators of family harmony in Eastern cultural communities which are not fully described in the concept of universal family harmony as proposed and developed by previous researchers in Western cultural groups.

Based on the explanation above, this research was conducted to answer several research questions. First, describing the level of family harmony among housewives caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, identifying the promoting and hampering factors that affect family harmony in housewives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHOD

The research was conducted using a mixed method that combines quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2012). The subjects involved in this study were 25 housewives in the city of Malang, East Java, Indonesia with an age range of 29–51 years, both working (21 = 84%) and not working (4 = 16%) who already had children and were currently pursuing education in the Kindergarten, Elementary, and Junior High School obtained purposively.

A survey and an interview were conducted on housewives to answer the research objectives. The survey was conducted using the Family Harmony Scale which consists of 10 items to describe five behavioral aspects, namely communication, conflict resolution, forbearance, identity, and quality time (Kavikondala *et al.*, 2016). Subjects were asked to fulfill the answers through four choices, namely Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1.

The interview guide was developed according to the problem statements and research objectives. This interview guide was created in a structured manner referring to the main points to be used to explore facts or data in the form of verbal data. The points of information collected include 1) sociodemography including age, status and type of work, and economic conditions, 2) perceptions and appraisal of the condition of family harmony, 3) expectations of a harmonious family condition, 4) the condition of family harmony during the COVID-19 pandemic took place, 5) the promoting and hampering factors of family harmony, and 6) the linkage of social restriction policies, work from home, learning from home, and limitation of activities outside the home during the pandemic with family harmony.

The Family Harmony Scale has been estimated for reliability and validity. Based on the results of the reliability estimation using the Cronbach Alpha Formula, it is known that the reliability score is 0.964 which indicates that the instrument is able to estimate the reliability of score (Creswell, 2012). While the differentiating of items function that reflect validity has a score range from 0.670–0.932 which indicates that all items are able to differentiate between subjects with low family harmony condition and subjects with high family harmony condition. Therefore, the findings obtained in this study can reflect and describe the actual condition of the subject based on valid and reliable data.

Quantitative data analysis was carried out with descriptive statistics. Meanwhile, for qualitative data analysis, data reduction and classification were carried out to find themes and sentiments that emerged from each theme.

RESULTS

Subjects from a population of 25 housewives with an age range of 29–51 years who worked (84%) and did not work (16%) stated that the COVID-19 pandemic did not disturb their family harmony as much as 96% and only 4% said the pandemic COVID 19 disrupts their family harmony. The aspect of the role as caregivers and educators, especially regarding their involvement as substitute teacher functions in motivating, monitoring, and accompanying their children during distance learning from home, it was acknowledged that the condition had a negative impact on their family harmony as much as 12% and 88% said it had no impact on their family harmony.

The prevalence of family harmony among housewives during the COVID-19 pandemic uses the criteria of family harmony (structure of family harmony) proposed by Kavikondala *et al.* (2016) are described in Table 1 below:

Table 1. The Prevalence of Family Harmony

Category	Score	Total	Percentage
High	31 – 40	21	84%
Moderate	19 – 30	2	8%
Low	4 – 18	2	8%

Subjectively when asked to place and position the condition of their family harmony in the range of number 1 which reflects a very disharmonious condition to number 7 which reflects a very harmonious condition, the answer is obtained as described in Figure 1 below:

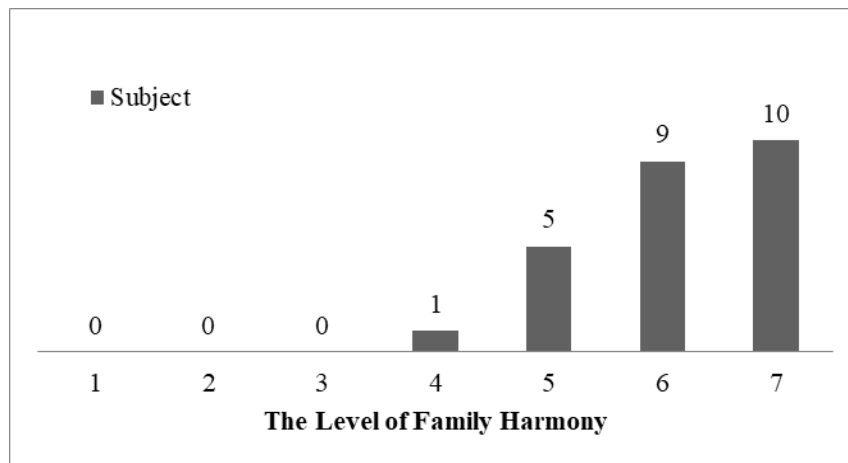


Figure 1. The Level of Family Harmony

The condition of the subject's family harmony when viewed in each aspect and indicator of behavior, then obtained information as described in Table 2 below:

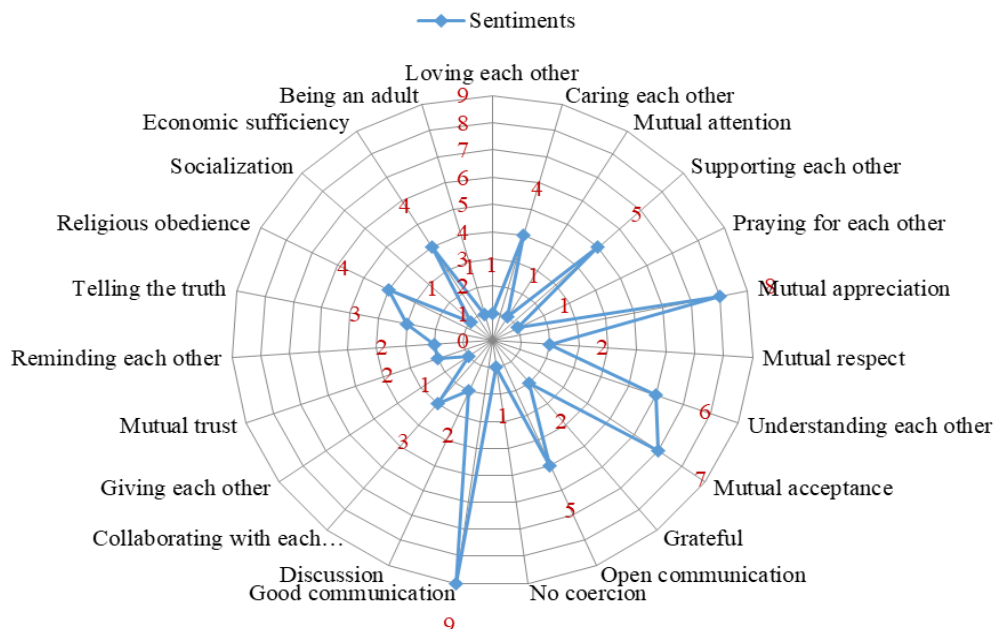
Table 2. The Condition of Family Harmony

Aspect	M*	Indicator	M*	Response**			
				1	2	3	4
Communication	3,42	1.a. Communicating every (daily) activity	3,32	1	2	10	12
		1.b. Listening (empathic) to each other	3,52	1	1	7	16
Conflict resolution	3,52	2.a. Solving problems together	3,52	1	2	5	17
		2.b. Respecting the differences of opinion	3,52	0	2	8	15
Forbearance	3,50	3.a. Accepting the strengths and weaknesses	3,56	1	1	6	17
		3.b. Surviving in joy and sorrow	3,44	2	1	6	16
Identity	3,44	4.a. Proud of the family	3,48	2	0	7	16
		4.b. Proud to be part of the family	3,40	3	0	6	16
Quality time	3,32	5.a. Having enough time for the family	3,16	1	4	10	10
		5.b. Satisfaction in living family life	3,48	2	1	5	17

* M = everage (mean)

** Response = the number of subjects who gave responses of choice 1, 2, 3, or 4 on each indicator

The promoting and hampering factors in a harmonious family condition have been identified into several themes. Several promoting factors that have been identified are described in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** The Promoting Factors of Family Harmony

Several hampering factors that have been identified are described in Figure 3:

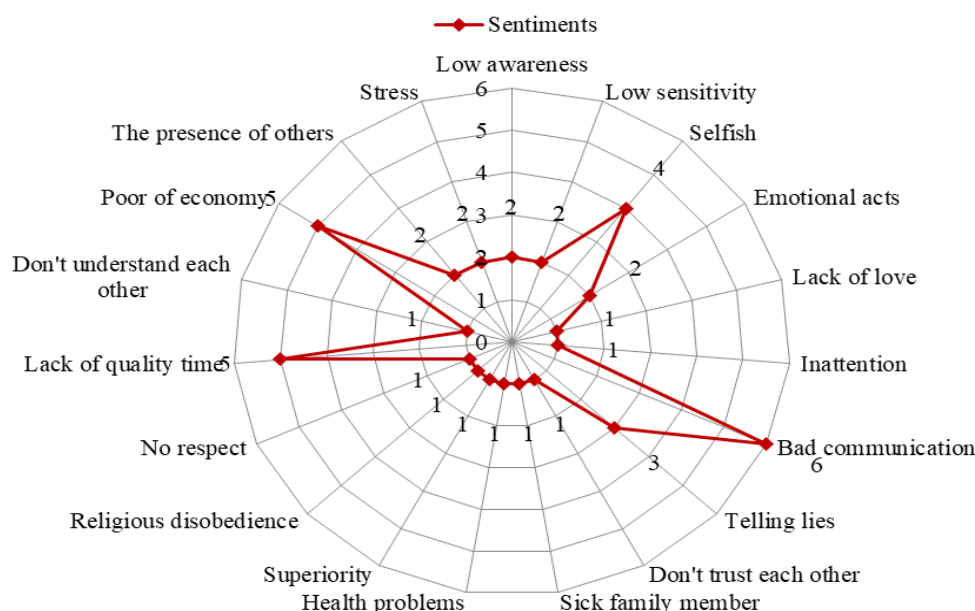


Figure 3. The Hampering Factors of Family Harmony

Government policies regarding restrictions on social activities outside the home (social distancing) that require them to work from home and learning from home for their children who are taking distance learning have an impact on their family harmony. There are subjects who feel the impact of this policy, especially regarding their parenting and teaching roles for several times while accompanying their children to take distance learning from home.

The first subject said that "*ibu lebih sering stres dengan tugas anak yang terlalu banyak* (mothers are often stressed with too many tasks for their children)" The second subject said that "*karena si kecil belum bisa mandiri saat belajar online sehingga mengganggu jadwal aktivitas harian mamanya* (because the little one can't be independent when joining online learning so it interferes with his mother's daily activity schedule)" The third subject said that "*harapan ibu yang terlalu tinggi pada anak namun karena lingkungan kurang mendukung (tidak seperti di kelas) dan tidak seperti faktanya* (the mother's expectations are too high for the child but the environment is not supportive (unlike in the classroom) and not like the facts)".

Subjects have dreams and hopes about harmonious families in their lives, especially during the long-lasting COVID-19 pandemic. Their hopes for a harmonious family, especially when dealing with the pandemic situation can be described as follows:

1. Communication

"*Keluarga harmonis yang selalu ada keterbukaan dalam setiap apapun, saling suport dan saling memahami setiap kekurangan dan kelebihan masing-masing keluarga, penuh kasih sayang cinta* (A harmonious family that always has **openness** in everything, supports each other and understands each other's weaknesses and strengths, full of love)" and "*Keluarga yang saling memahami, saling menghargai, dan komunikasi terjalin dengan baik* (A family that **understands each other**, respects each other, and communicates well)".

2. Conflict resolution

"*Keluarga yang antara suami dan istri bisa berjalan beriringan, yang kompak dan saling mengerti dan ketika ada masalah diselesaikan bersama dengan bermusyawarah* (A family where husband and wife can **go hand in hand**, who are **compact** and understand each other and when there is a problem they are **resolved together** by deliberation)" and "*Keluarga yang mampu menghargai dan menghormati setiap perbedaan yang ada serta mampu berkomunikasi antar anggota keluarga dengan baik* (A family that is able to **appreciate** and **respect every difference** that exists and is able to communicate well between family members)".

3. Forbearance

"*Harmonis itu penuh warna, saling melengkapi kekurangan masing-masing dan memuji kelebihan masing-masing, menghargai usaha masing-masing dan support pada semua* (Harmony is **colorful**, **complementing each other's weaknesses** and praising each other's strengths, appreciating each other's efforts and supporting all family members)" and "*Keluarga yang tenang, hidup rukun tanpa pertengkaran. Kejujuran sangat dipegang teguh. Suami istri tidak ada kebohongan terutama masalah uang* (A **calm** family, living in harmony without fighting. Honesty is **very upheld**. Husband and wife don't lie, especially money matters)".

4. Identity

“*Harmonis itu penuh warna, saling melengkapi kekurangan masing-masing dan memuji kelebihan masing-masing, menghargai usaha masing-masing dan support pada semua* (Harmony is colorful, complementing each other's weaknesses and **praising each other's strengths**, appreciating each other's efforts and supporting all)” and “*Keluarga yang saling mencintai, menyayangi dan memotivasi* (A family that **loves, cares** and motivates each other)”.

5. Quality time

“*Menjadwalkan waktu bersama keluarga inti, memiliki kualitas komunikasi dan hubungan yang baik* (Schedule time with nuclear family, have good communication and relationship quality)” and “*Damai di dalam keluarga, rukun dan selalu bahagia dan ceria sesama keluarga* (Peace in the family, **get along well** and always **be happy** and **cheerful** among family)”

DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic that impinge almost all countries in the world, including Indonesia, which had gone through wave 1 and wave 2, was appraised by the subject as an unpleasant and tense situation. This indicates that the current pandemic has the potential to be a stressor in human life (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), including housewives. The potential stress experienced by housewives can have different levels of strength depending on how each individual appraises and perceives the pandemic situation they are dealing with and the availability of own resources (material and non-material/psychological) in overcoming the stressful situation. This psychological dynamic has the potential to affect the condition of family harmony.

It is known that 96% of housewives said that the COVID-19 pandemic had not disturbed family harmony, while 4% had disturbed family harmony. When viewed from the point of phenomenological psychology perspective (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) it is known that the COVID-19 pandemic has a level of tense that affects family harmony of 1:24 people. The aspect of parenting role, especially regarding their involvement as substitute teacher (educator) in motivating, monitoring, and accompanying their children during distance learning from home, it was acknowledged that this condition had a negative impact on family harmony as much as 12% and 88% said does not affect family harmony. This condition is very important for the sustainability of the family life, especially in accompanying their children during participate in the distance learning that need learning readiness (emotionally) and high effort to adapt. Idiarni, Nurdin & Bakar (2018) report their research finding that the family harmony correlated positively with emotional stability of adolescents. Hadi & Rusmawati (2019) also report from their research finding that family harmony correlated positively with positive self-concept of Senior High School students.

The prevalence of family harmony among housewives during the COVID-19 pandemic showed a high percentage of 84% in high level by using the structure of family harmony criteria proposed by Kavikondala *et al.* (2016). The condition of family harmony in the housewives who were sampled in this study showed positive symptoms, did not indicate any worrying conditions during the pandemic. This is supported by their subjective view of the state of family harmony they have felt so far, especially during the pandemic, which shows that the sentiment response to the level of family harmony is more inclined towards the positive side (very harmonious) that range from 4 to 7 levels. This finding consistent with the result of the Global Survey in the beginning pandemic (2020) that Indonesian people more resilient than population from other countries in dealing with COVID-19 pandemic (Tempo, 2020).

All aspects of family harmony proposed by Kavikondala *et al.* (2016) is strongly reflected in the research sample, except for one of the indicators of two aspects, namely communication and quality time. Whereas those aspects are main strategies for couple (husband and wife) in maintaining the family harmony of career woman (Putri & Gutama, 2018). The indicator “communicating every (daily) activity” from the communication aspect and the indicator “having enough time for the family” from the quality time aspect to get a low positive sentiment response. Uncertainty regarding social restriction policies that result in restrictions on other aspects of life such as education, economy, social, and religion causes individuals in the family to experience difficulties in communicating the various activities in daily life they undertake with certainty. The obligation to do work from home and learning from home activities which require housewives who work as career women to carry out double role at once (take care of the household, work, and replace the role of teachers), and are required to adapt to the use of internet-based digital technology, such as information management systems to support the smooth running of work and a learning management system to support the smooth learning process of their children during distance learning. This condition is clearly difficult and diverts the time together to the demands and targets that must be completed, so that the time together feels a little or even less quality.

The dominant aspects that can strengthen family harmony are conflict resolution and forbearance. This is consistent with research finding of Fincham, Hall & Beach (2006) that forgiveness correlated negatively with conflict, and even it can increase well-being and improve interpersonal relationship. Fincham, Beach & Davila (2004) argue that forgiveness have a main function to overcoming the pain, betrayed and self-healing in family

conflict. This finding confirms previous research findings that indicator “accepting the strengths and weaknesses” as the dominant factors in the family harmony status, followed by other indicators such as “respecting the differences of opinion”, “listening (empathic) to each other”, and “solving problems together” those all reflect the forgiveness essens.

There are many factors that influence housewives who work as career women in perceiving their family harmony during the pandemic with the social distancing policy. On the one hand, they have to complete household and office work, but on the other hand, they must also replace the role of the teacher, which has been entirely left to the school. Dua & Hyronimus (2020) report their research finding that career woman who can not balance their double role, more vulnerable affected stress. Several factors that can promot the success of families in maintaining and increasing family harmony, namely: good communication between family members, mutual appreciation between family members, mutual acceptance of the strengths and weaknesses of family members, mutual understanding the wills of family members, open communication, and supporting among family members, especially in solving problems. These promoting factors can be optimized to strengthening the family harmony in order to can balance their double role and hindered from stress.

Factors that hamper the success of the family in maintaining and improving family harmony were also identified. Some of the hampering factors include bad or poor communication between family members, lack of quality time together with family members, poor of the family's economy, selfishness and ingnoring family members, emotional acts, low self-awareness and self-sensitivity to the presence of other people who always disturb family harmony. These factors make it worse family conditions when housewives have to carry out various complex roles simultaneously without having time to relaxe, calm and restful atmosphere while chatting with their husbands and children. Therefore, family harmony is difficult to be established and in the end there is no sense of satisfaction in living family life. Consistent with the Putri & Gutama (2018) research finding that communication and quality time are dominant factors affecting family harmony.

Housewives, both working and not working, dream and expect to build up a harmonious family relationship. They dream a harmonious family in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic which includes five aspects as stated by Kavikondala *et al.* (2016), namely 1) communication, 2) conflict resolution, 3) forbearance, 4) identity, and 5) quality time. These five conditions were stated by them through interviews conducted by researchers with respondents or research samples. The suitability of the concept structure and the construct of family harmony proposed by Kavikondala *et al.* (2016) with the empirical findings or conditions of this research subject because both are based on eastern cultural groups that prioritize communal values. The structure of family harmony was developed with an indigenous approach to Hong Kong people who follow Chinese culture, while the research subject is Indonesian people who follow eastern culture which is not too different from Chinese culture.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it was found that the condition of family harmony in housewives who work as career women did not experience a significant negative impact from the COVID-19 pandemic condition. Only a few housewives have experienced the direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their family harmony. The promoting factors include good communication, mutual appreciation, mutual acceptance of strengths and weaknesses, mutual understanding the wills of family members, open communication and mutual support among family members, especially in solving problems. Meanwhile, several hampering factors have also been identified including poor communication, lack of quality of time for family, selfishness, emotional acts, and low self-awareness and sensitivity the people in the workplace and the neighbourhood, especially to friends in the work environment and the environment around where they live. This research results could be used to facilitate housewife to manage their family after COVID-19 pandemic to create more harmony family.

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