

Systematic Literature Review On Social Support System For Labor Market Participation Of Mothers

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Abstract

Motherhood penalty refers to the negative impact of maternity on women's career, which implicates the inferior status of women in labor market. To improve women's situation in labor market participation, multiple social support measures should be introduced including sharing childcare responsibility and career sustaining to help mothers achieve a work-family balance. This study aims to systematically review and analyze the social practice applied to support mothers' labor force participation. By adopting a scoping review method, this study uses Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar as the main database in searching for relevant articles. The thematic analysis uncovers the constitution of current social support system for mothers' labor market participation, which crosses the public and private sphere, as well as its multiple functions, which potentially provide framework for future research in this topic related fields.

Keywords: *motherhood penalty, sharing childcare responsibility, career sustaining.*

Introduction

Women's participation in labor market participation is an irreversible trend nowadays. Women's labor market participation is of significance for individual, family and the whole society. However, previous studies reveal women's inferior status in labor market in comparison with men, manifested with lower employment rates and fewer chances of employment and promotion (Agénor & Agénor, 2023; Samtleben & Müller, 2022). Despite of the increasing number of women in employment in the recent decades, gender discrimination rooted in perception of stereotype gender roles constitutes the major cause of gender inequality in labor market (Samtleben & Müller, 2022). As a result, numerous women experienced career penalty during maternity period as they are supposed to make domestic responsibility prior to their own career. Jones and Wilcher (2024) claimed that more than quarter of women in the U.S. leave the labor force when they have a child. Mothering penalty reflects the negative impact of fertility on women's career, which is considered as the major cause of decreasing birth rate (Kristensen & Lappégaard, 2022). Besides, the exclusion of women causes waste of human capital and decreasing well-being of women (Mu & Tian, 2022; Johnstone & Lucke, 2022). To eliminate the negative impact of gender inequality in labor market, researches on women's labor market participation should be conducted to provide evidence for the practice to improve women's situation in labor market participation.

This review focuses on labor market participation of women as mother figure and adopts a social support perspective. The nature of the problem lies in the contradiction between mother figures' aspiration for labor market participation and the rejection from labor market. This reflects the supposed reproduction and caring responsibility of women and the profit-driving oriented modern enterprises. Both contradictions reflect women's internal conflict of double roles as employee and mother (Gauthier et al., 2022). The social role expectation of female limits women's choice of employment. Consequently, women as mother figure face dilemma as they are forced to choose either work or family. To improve the current situation of women in labor market, scholars and policy makers in different countries reach a consensus that the endeavor in support of women's labor market participation requires corporation among individuals, groups, organizations and institutions (Greer & Kirk, 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to construct a social support system that enable different individuals, groups, organizations and institutions to work coordinately to provide multiple assistance for women's market participation as mother figure.

In synthetization of definition from prior studies, social support system refers to the collective endeavor made by the network of individuals, groups, organizations and institutions to provide multiple

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assistance for an individual or a group of people in need of help and encouragement. This is crucial to promote positive outcome of action (Greer & Kirk, 2022). Social support system is a multifaceted concept often categorized in terms of its benefits as a) instrumental support; b) informational support; c) emotional support; d) appraisal support. Based on the provider, social support can be categorized as formal support and informal support. The former is provided by organizations and institutions while the later is offered by individuals involved in the recipients' own social relationships such as family members, friends and neighbors.

This review aims at examining the existing literature on social support system for labor market participation of women to identify the research gap in this topic related field. Based on the purpose, the objectives of the review are 1) to describe the constitution of current social supportive system for women's labor market participation as mother figure. 2) to evaluate the effectiveness of current social supportive system for women's labor market participation as mother figure.

Methodology

Scoping review Statement

This review adopts a scoping review method (Arksey & O'malley, 2005; Andreassen, Breit, & Saltkjel, 2020). Compared with some more technical and rigorous method such as PRISMA, scoping review is preferable when the topic of the review complex as it takes a broad and explorative perspective (Andreassen & Saltkjel, 2020; Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). As social support system is a multifaceted concept and the labor market participation of women is a cross-disciplinary topic involves sociology, economy and management, scoping review is preferred as it is able to clarify the key concepts and identify multiple research gaps embodied in a body of literature with complex evidences.

Formulation of Question

The research questions are formulated on the basis of PICo, a tool that assists authors in developing suitable research questions for review. PICo is the acronym of Population, Interest, and Context. Based on these concepts, this study has included three main aspects in the review: mother figure (population), social support (interest), and labour-market participation (context). Based on PICo, the questions of this review are 1) What types of social support is provided for women's labor market participation as mother figure? How they constitute a system? 2) To what extent the current social supportive system satisfies the needs of women in labor market participation as mother figure?

Systematic searching strategies

The review is initiated with an explorative search and selection process to detect the relevant studies related to the topic, three stages are involved, namely identification, screening, and eligibility as Figure 2.1 shows.

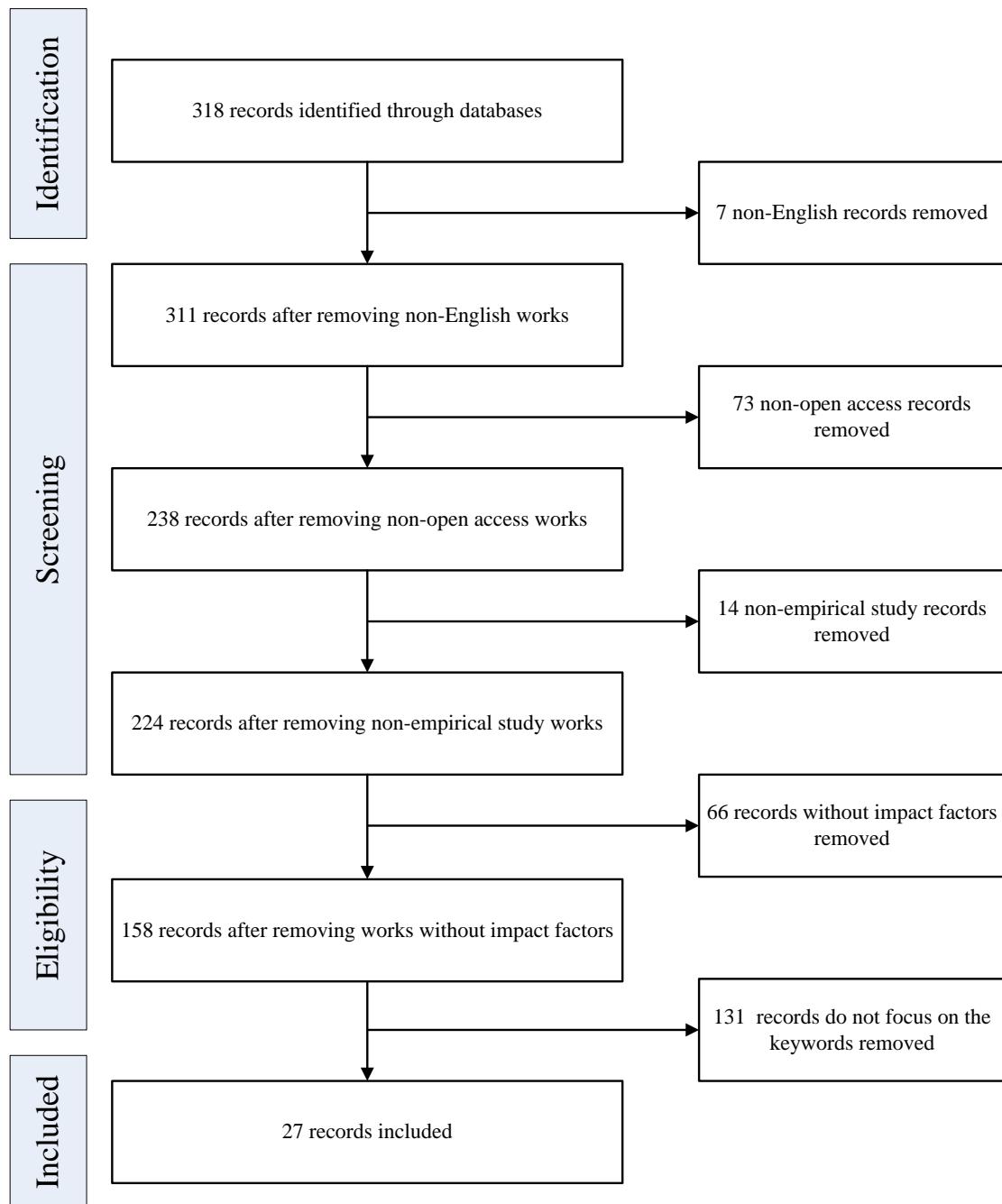


Figure 2.1 Process of data selection

Identification is the process that initially search for literature published in the recent 5 years (between 2020 and 2024) related to the keywords. In the process of identification, following the research question based on PICo, the setting of keywords is set around the concepts of “social support”, “labor market participation”, “women”, “mother figure” and their synonyms. Table 2.2.1 illustrate the detailed settings of searching process:

Table 2.1 Detailed settings of searching progress

Database	Settings of Keywords	Publication Date	Records identified

Web of Science	TS= ("social support" OR "social support system") AND TS= ("labor market participation" OR "labor force participation" OR "employment") AND TS=("women" OR "female") AND TS= ("mother" OR "mothers" OR "motherhood" OR "mothering" OR "mother figure" OR "maternity")	2020-2024	71
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY= ("social support" OR "social support system" AND "labor market participation" OR "labor force participation" OR "employment" AND "women" OR "female" AND "mothers" OR "motherhood" OR "mothering" OR "mother figure" OR "maternity")	2020-2024	153
Google Scholar (Continuation)	KEYWORDS= ("social support" AND "labor market participation" AND "women" AND "mothering")	2020-2024	94 (To be continued)
TOTAL			318

Screening is the process aims to narrow the range of literature. In the process of screening. The initially identified 318 records are primarily screened in accordance with the following criteria:

a) English publication; b) Open access; c) Empirical study. After removing non-English (7 records), non-open access (73 records), non-empirical study (14 records), records with on impact factors (66 records) 158 records are put into the process of eligibility.

The eligibility is a process aims at identifying relevant articles by browsing and skimming. In the process of eligibility, records meet the following criteria are identified as eligible records, otherwise non-eligible: 1) Studies involve women as mother figure who is employed or have the intention to get re-employed. 2) Studies involve social support endeavors target on labor market participation of women as mother figure. Finally, 27 records are included and put into the analysis process.

Quality appraisal

Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) checklist is used to assess the quality of data. CASP checklist is a question list used for evaluating the reliability and relevance of empirical research studies. Generally, questions of CASP checklist are centered with the clarity of research objective and the appropriateness of research design, which detailed including the following criteria: a) The clarity of the statement of research problem, questions and objectives; b) The methodological appropriateness of data collecting and analysis; c) The inclusion of all the subjects' circumstance in conclusion; d) The consideration of relationship between researchers and respondents.

The step of data quality appraisal consists of the following four steps: For the first step, the study is read thoroughly. Next, questions in the checklist are selected to answer based on the type of research. Then, a summary of the strength and weakness is made based on the answer of each question. Finally, an informed decision on the validity and applicability of the study is made.

Data extraction and analysis

Data extraction is the process of retrieving key information from various source of literature for the subsequent data analysis. In this review, the data extraction is based on the standard procedure of data extraction and the objectives of the review. Table 2.2 illustrates the categories of information retrieved.

Table 2.2 Categories of data extraction

Categories	Subcategories
Title, author, year of publication	
Country	
Methodology	Quantitative method / qualitative method
Applied theory	
Target population	
Context of research	
Provider of social support	Formal support / Informal support
Type of social support.	Instrumental support / informational support / emotional support / appraisal support

This review applies a thematic analysis method for data analysis. Thematic analysis is widely used for analyzing qualitative data as it is able to identify, synthesize and report patterns embodied in qualitative data. The themes of the review are generated based on the type of social support. Sub themes are formed based on the further analysis based on the detected similarity and connection between different research studies.

Finally, narrative synthesis method is used to synthesize data for reporting as it is able to pull the fragment knowledge and evidence together when there is no self-evident or universally agreed procedure (Andreassen, Breit, & Saltkjel, 2020; Greenhalgh et al., 2005). The data synthesis process is generally centered with answering the following questions: a) What type of social support is currently used for labor market participation of women as mother figure? b) What type of social support is in need for labor market participation of women as mother figure? c) Why some social support is lacked for labor market participation of women as mother figure? And d) What is the potential approach to improve social support for labor market participation of women as mother figure? In answering the above questions, the research gaps related to the topic in terms of knowledge, evidence, methodology and population is identified, which potentially map out the direction for future research.

Results

Spatial and temporal analysis of selected articles

27 articles from 16 countries written in English and published between 2020 and 2024 is analyzed in this review after a rigorous data selection procedure. Figure 3.1 shows the general national spatial distribution of the selected articles and Figure 3.2 shows the countries with largest number of selected articles. The United States is the country with highest number with 5 articles, followed by both Netherlands and Israel with 3 articles. China and Australia rank 3rd with each 2 articles. The other 12 countries only respectively have 1 article. Besides, 1 article is a cross-national study involves 40 countries from Europe, North America, Australia and Asia.

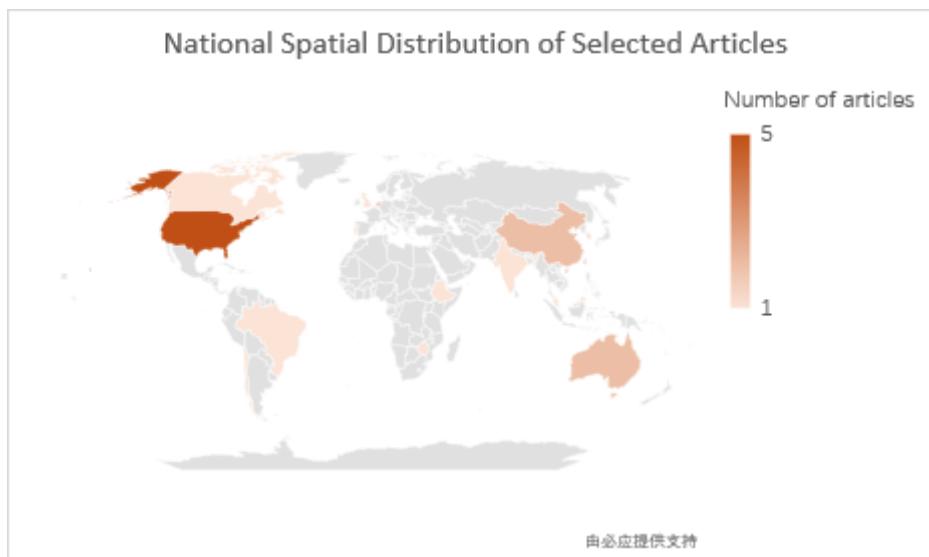


Figure 3.1 National Spatial Distribution of Selected Articles

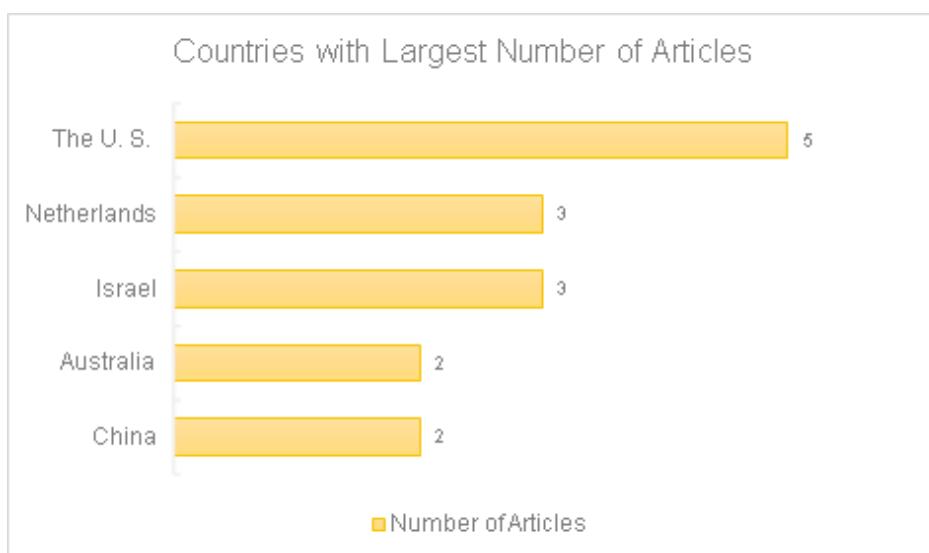


Figure 3.2 Countries with largest number of articles

As figure 3.3 demonstrates, in terms of a broader social-economic spatial context, more than half of the articles (16 articles) are from Europe, North America and Australia, where the development of economic is more advanced than other regions. Among the under-developed third world continent, Asia is keener with mothers' labor market participation in recent years. 5 articles come from Asia, including 2 articles from China, 1 article respectively from South Korea and India. Research on mother's labor market participation is backward in Africa and Latin America, with only 2 articles respectively for each.

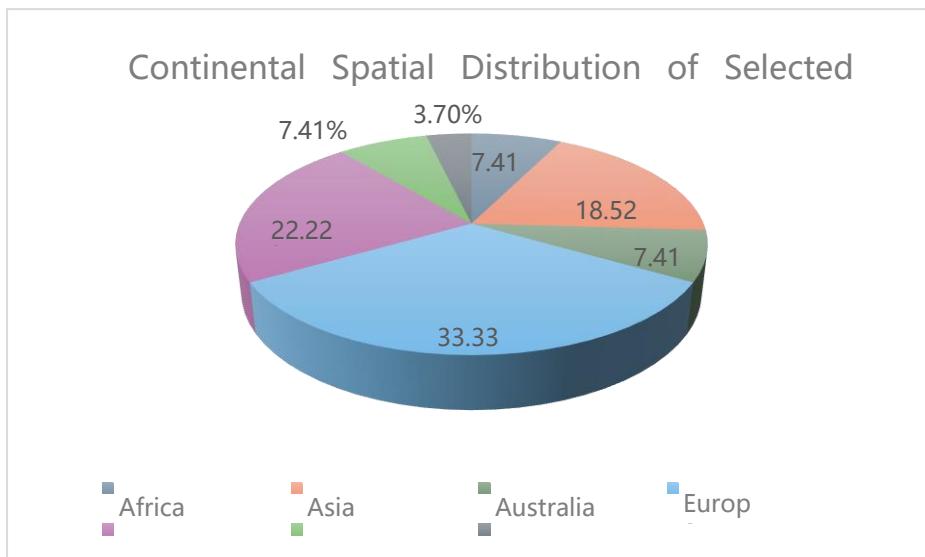


Figure 3.3 Continental Spatial Distribution of Selected Articles

Figure 3.3 describes the number of articles published yearly. Considering the temporal allocation of studies, Research on social support for labor market participation of mothers reached to its peak in 2021 and 2022, with more than half of the total articles (14 articles) published during this period, which is coincide with the period of COVID-19 pandemic. Some researchers conducted their research in context of COVID-19 pandemic reveals the increasing concern of social support for mothers' labor market participation in consequence of the working from home mode and rising unemployment (Lamy et al., 2023; Zanhou & Sumpter, 2024).

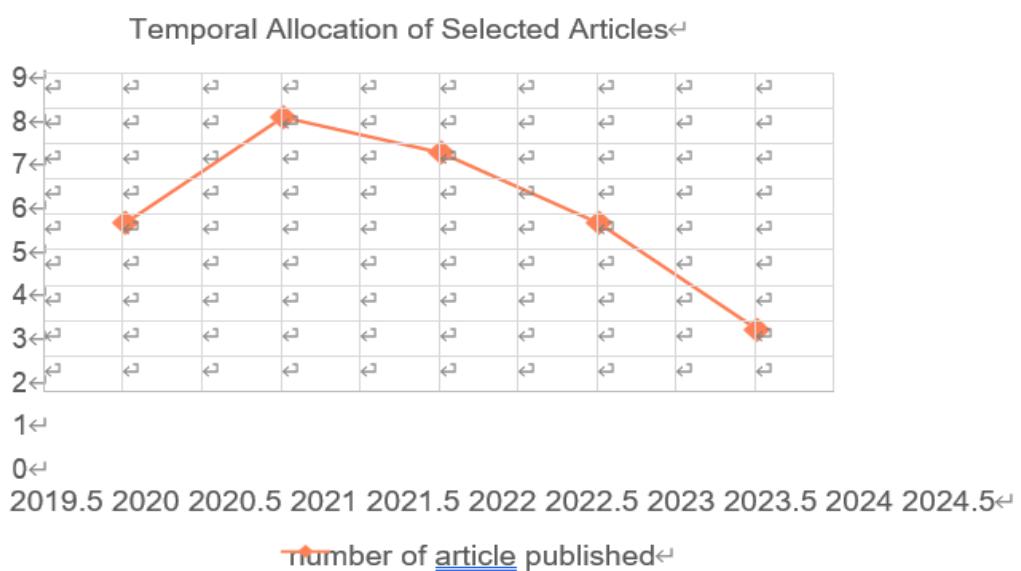


Figure 3.3 Temporal allocation of selected articles

Contextual issues

This review addresses the following four contextual issues from the selected 27 articles: a) the methodology adopted in research; b) the theory applied to the research; c) the population on which research targeted and d) the context in which research conducted.

In terms of adopted methodology, with 14 articles use qualitative research, the number of qualitative research approximately takes fifty-fifty of quantitative research with 13 articles. Among the qualitative researches, most of the research employ an in-depth interview or semi-structured interview to collect qualitative data in spite of various methodology adopted to the researches including biological

narrative method, phenomenological method and ethnographical method. As for quantitative research, data is collected through questionnaire survey. With 7 articles including 1 article use population-wide register data, cross-sectional data analysis is the most preferred data analysis method, which accounts for more than one half of the number of quantitative research. 6 of the articles utilize longitudinal data analysis including 1 utilize time use data.

As for applied theory, nearly two third (17) of the articles do not clearly state the adopted theoretical framework. For the quantitative researches, hypothesizes are proposed on the basis of the results of previous researches (Roxo, Porto, & Perelman, 2022; Walker & Murry, 2022; Lee, Ruppanner, & Perales, 2020), whereas conclusion is made in coincidence with the results of previous study through empirical qualitative researches (Díaz, M.Y., 2022; Lamy et al., 2023; Van Gasse, & Mortelmans, 2020). Only 10 of the researches adopt theoretical basis related to work, family and gender. The results of applied theory analysis reveals that there is a lack of dominant theoretical framework in existing researches on social support for women's labor market participation as mother figure, which indicates the need of empirical research on this topic in order to develop theory in this field.

In consideration of the target population of the research, nearly half of the articles (13 articles) epitomize a universal target, addressing a wide range of mother figures from diverse demographical and social economic background (Scott et al., 2021; Zewdie et al., 2022; Song, J.E., Roh, Chae, & Kim, 2022). The other half of the articles (14 articles) target specifically on a group with particular demographic or social background. Among these articles, the following 3 types of mothers receive the most attention from scholars: a) Young or adolescent mothers (3 articles) who encounter many problems in terms of childrearing burden and self-growth (Dicks et al, 2022; Tinago et al., 2021; Sniekers & Rommes, 2020). b) Single, solo or lone mothers (3 articles) who face more severe work-family conflict as they are both breadwinner and caregiver of the family, exploring how they cope with the conflict between work and family (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020; Lechtman, 2023; Li & Avendano, 2023). c) Low-income mothers (2 articles) who from low socioeconomic backgrounds face grave financial burden. This force them to devote themselves to work in order to support their family, thus, they confront with the same work-family conflict as single mothers. Moreover, mothers from lower social economic background are often lack of resource, qualification and skills, which excludes them from the labor market (Smith et al., 2021; Offer, 2021). d) Migrant mothers (2 articles), especially the first-generation mothers, who have not obtained the permanent residency. They often experienced hardships as they are not able to be guaranteed with the same welfare in finance, working and daily life. Besides, they often have to fit the new culture, which aggravates their stress of work and family (Lee, Ruppanner & Perales, 2020).

The context of research can be generally divided into the following three types: a) working context (7 articles), which means that the research examine social support aims at helping working mothers archive a work-family balance to sustain their career after giving birth (Roxo et al., 2022; Mat Pozian, Miller & Mays, 2024). b) non-working context (1 article). Contrary to working context, researches conducted in non-working context focus on the social support for facilitating labor market participation of non-working mothers who have the intention of entry the labor market (Tinago et al., 2021). c) mixed context (19 articles). Most of the researches address both working and non-working circumstances of different respondents in order to have a comprehensive knowledge of social support for mothers' labor market participation (Walker & Murry, 2022; Dicks et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2021). In regard to the number of articles distributed to different research context, articles attributed to non- working context is outnumbered in comparison with the articles involves working context, which implicates the gap in social support for the entry or re-entry into labor market of mothers.

Thematic analysis of social support for mothers' labor market participation

Three main themes and seven subthemes related to social support for labor participation of women as mother figure is extracted from the selected 27 articles: a) Instrumental support, including i) Childcare and early education; ii) offering employment opportunity; iii) vocational training; iv) work-family balance facilitating. b) Emotional support, including i) professional psychological consultation; ii) intimate relationship. c) Informational support. The themes are developed on the basis of the type of social support, which means what kind of assistance the provider offer the recipient. The themes of the review are named after the type of assistance according to the theory of social support (Wills, 1985; Wills, 1991). Appraisal support is not included in the themes as none of the article involves this type of support.

Instrumental social support

Mentioned by 25 articles in total, instrumental support is considered as the most prevalent type of support applies to assist women's labor market participation. Instrumental support refers to the provision of financial benefits, material goods and services in order to assist people to achieve their goals or overcome difficulties (Wills et al., 2012). 2 means of instrumental support for mothers' labor market participation extracted from the selected 27 articles are systematically analyzed in following paragraphs:

a) Assistance of career sustaining

For working mothers, instrumental support for mother's labor market participation serves as service aims at helping mothers cope with conflict between working and motherhood, achieving a work-family balance and sustain their career after giving birth. Specific practice to support working mothers including:

i) Assistance of childcare.

Assistance of childcare aims at helping working mothers reduce the stress of parenting young children while working. Parenting young children is time and energy consuming, thus affect mothers' career promotion as they are supposed to be centered with children's needs. Childcare assistance enables women engage in their work as there is someone else help them taking care of their children. Generally, childcare assistance can be categorized into two types.

One is familial childcare, which means childcare within the family, such as fathers, grandparents and other kinships. Despite of diverse cultural background, family is considered as the primary place of socialization, where children receive love and care, as well as learn basic life skills and social norms from their parents, grandparents, siblings and other kinships. Compare to extent families, nuclear families need more support as parents in nuclear families take all the responsibility of childcare, which sometimes potentially lead to drop out from employment of mothers as they are occupied with childcare while their spouse at work. In recent years, paid parental leaving for fathers to promote fathers' participation of childrearing is proposed, which cause debate among scholars and policy makers. Li, Knoester & Petts, (2021) examined people's attitude towards paid parental leaving for fathers across 40 countries in Europe, North America, Australia and Asia. The research found that paid parental leaving for fathers is largely supported by public as it encourages fathers participate in childcare, which reduce the burden of mothers, thus ensuring mothers' career sustain and promote gender equality within family. However, the research also find that intensive parenting ideology and expectation of dual-earning are proved to prevent people from agreeing the paid parental leaving for fathers. Li et al (2021) point out that ideology of intensive parenting always pushes mothers into dilemma as it emphasizes both devotion of time, energy and money. Many working mothers resort to extent families. For instance, working young mothers often rely on kinship in extent family to help them with childcare, thus enable them sustain their career after childbirth (Dicks et al., 2022; Sniekers & Rommes, 2020). Same evidence is also founded in the research on low-income mothers and migrant background mothers (Lee, Ruppanner & Perales, 2020; Offer, 2021). Kinship is considered as the most economic and convenient provider for childcare assistance as it requires no cost and contract procedure, so that is is widely used in a wide range of circumstances. Generally, a reciprocity is formed through intergenerational childcare, when parents provide funding for the whole family through their work while grandparents share the responsibility of parenting (Dicks et al., 2022). However, the intergenerational childcare sharing responsibility can be dysfunctional in low-income family as there is a lack of reciprocity. Compare with higher income families, ties in low-income families are more vulnerable as the reciprocity among kinship are subject to be broken by inability to assistance as a result of low socioeconomic status, as well as physical or mental disability and illness (Offer, 2021). As for migrant background families, family members in home countries sometimes are prevented from reunion due to the restrain of limited duration of immigration policy and the culture- language barrier, which make it difficult for intergenerational parenting (Lee, Ruppanner, & Perales, 2020).

Another is institutional childcare. Institutional childcare refers to childcare service provided by public or private institutions such as daycare center, which is considered as the subside of familial childcare. To some extent, childcare institutions share part of parenting responsibility with working parents who are not able to rely on kinship. This enables parents, especially mothers engage in work, thus sustain mothers' career. Among the various childcare institution, daycare center installed at workplace and public universal childcare service should be particularly addressed as they serve as the approaches to meet the intensive mothering and the cost-saving expectation of working mothers. Daycare center installed at workplace ensure young children under the parental protection by

minimizing the physical distance between parents and children, similarly some enterprises allow mothers work from home, which enable parents to look after children while working (Zewdie et al., 2024). Universal public childcare service is particularly concerned as it serves the solution to childcare in low-income families, especially when the intergenerational parenting is dysfunctional (Lee, Ruppanner & Perales, 2020).

ii) Assistance of work-family balance facilitating.

Assistance of work-family balance facilitating is also crucial to mothers' career sustainability. Work-family balance for mothers refers to the ability to manage their career while take responsibility of parenting children, which essentially serve as a balance of double role as an employee and a mother. Nowadays many new working mothers are reported to feel an internal role conflict as they are not able to achieve a work-life balance, which is proved to be the main cause of maternal stress and other mental issues (Díaz, 2022). Work-family balance facilitating assistance examined in the selected articles mainly concentrate on offering flexible worktime arrangement for mothers, which enable them take time for parenting their children (Mat Pozian, Miller, & Mays, 2024). Besides, some enterprises offer postpartum mothers childcare service and breastfeeding facilities at workplace, which enable mothers take care of children while working (Zewdie et al., 2022; Hentges & Pilot, 2021). Apart from flexible worktime schedule, work-family balance facilitating reflects a more humanized employment norm instead of ideal worker norm. Ideal worker norm emphasizes on work priority, work intensification, increasing competitiveness and surface-level support (Zanhour & Sumpter, 2024). Ideal worker norm is prevalent in modern enterprises as it enables employers make the maximized surplus value for their employees, which is considered as the major cause of work- family conflict of mothers who are parenting young children. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the universally existing ideal worker norms is reinforced in organizations and internalized by employees, which lead to the tension between work and family for mothers who are parenting young children (Zanhour & Sumpter, 2024). Therefore, working mothers feel interrupted when they have to parent children while being occupied with work. This lead to the dysfunction of support practice such as flexible worktime arrangement and working from home.

iii) Assistance of labor market re-entry

For non-working mothers, the purpose of instrumental support is to help mothers who intend to restore their career re-enter the labor market. In recent years, an increasing number of women drop out of labor market after transition to motherhood in many countries despite of educational and socioeconomic background (Jones & Wilcher, 2024; Mu & Tian, 2022). Though many stay-at-home mothers expected to restore their career when their children become more independent, most of them are reported to be excluded from labor market (Xu & Chan, 2024). The unemployment of stay-at- home mothers reflects motherhood penalty, which reveals the negative impact of maternity on women's career, which is serve as waste of human resource and affects women's wellbeing (Johnstone & Lucke, 2022). In a long-term consequence, it potentially leads to the low fertility intention, which result in decreasing birth rate and accelerate the aging population (Kristensen & Lappégård, 2022). To address the unemployment of stay-at-home mothers, measures should be taken to assist non-working mother re-entry the employment. Generally, the following two types of assistances of labor market re-entry are extracted from the selected articles.

The most direct assistance for non-working mothers' re-entry the labor market is offering them employment opportunity. Offering opportunity is crucial to mothers in vulnerable circumstances. Tinago et al (2021) studied a community-based NGO program employ adolescent mothers work for the community in Zimbabwe, where being an adolescent mothers suffer from poverty, social isolation and stigma, and lack of employment opportunity to support their family, which affect the mental health and wellbeing seriously. The community-based program employs adolescent mothers as assistant health workers, which make them economic independent and improve their wellbeing (Tinago et al 2021). Similarly, Li & Avendano (2023) examined the lone parents' employment policy in United Kingdom, where non-employed lone mothers are offered job seeking allowance including recruitment assistance, such as registering with recruitment agencies, writing cv, and job matching. From a broad perspective, offering employment opportunity for mothers means eliminate gender discrimination in recruitment. In many countries, especially some more under developed countries, women are lack of employment opportunity as they are regarded as the caregiver who is supposed to stay at home, taking care of the family rather than go out to work (Bueno & Grau-Grau, 2021). Therefore, mothers' opportunity of working is deprived, which lead to the inferior status of women in labor market.

Apart from gender discrimination rooted in patriarchal gender norms, the lack of advanced professional skills and qualification is also considered as the cause of unemployment of stay-at-home mothers, which indicates the need of vocational training. The contemporary society is a world where technique iteration is rapidly, which requires life-long learning for all labor market participant in order to enhance their competence. However, for mothers drop out of labor market, the stay-at-home motherhood serves as a stagnation when they are occupied with childrearing, which leads to lack of competence in their later job seeking. Vocational training enables mothers accumulate their professional skills, thus enhance the their competence in labor market. A few of the selected articles mentioned the vocational training for non-working mothers. Li & Avendano (2023) introduced the vocational training included in the British lone mother employment policy, which enable the non-employed lone mothers have vocational training by a work coach, building skills to obtain the qualification for job. Similarly, Tinago et al (2021) described the peer support group for adolescent mothers, which gather adolescent mothers together for working skill building, which is proved to be feasible.

Emotional social support

With 8 articles mentioned, emotional support attracts the second largest attention from scholars. Emotional support refers to showing positive attitude and affection to the recipient to make them feel warmth, nurturance, and a sense of being valued (Langford et al., 1997; Slevin et al., 1996; Taylor, 2011). Emotional support plays an important role in supporting mothers' labor market participation as it effectively helps mothers cope with maternity stress and improve their sense of wellbeing. This enable them have a positive mentality to embrace the challenge they faced at work and home. The extracted information from the selected articles indicated that there are two main sources of emotional support. One major source of emotional support is intimate relationships between spouse, kinships and close friends (Tinago et al 2021; Offer, 2021; Eyal-Lubling & Benjamin, 2022). Lubling and Benjamin (2022) described how the intergenerational emotional ties between mother and daughter promote daughter's career development. Tinago et al (2021) explored the emotional ties among members of adolescent mothers' peer support group, which serves an intervention to improve adolescent mothers' mental health condition. The other source is professional psychological consultation provided by professional mental health worker. Professional psychological consultation is widely applied to treat maternity stress and its related mental issues as it effectively helps mothers cope with stress from work and family, as well as improve their wellbeing, and it serve as a subside function of family (Lamy et al., 2023; Walker & Murry, 2022; Smith et al., 2021).

Informational social support

With only 3 articles mentioned, informational support for mothers' labor market participation remains an under researched sub-field of social support for mothers' labor market participation. Informational support refers to providing the recipients with suggestion, guidance and useful information that potentially help the recipients solve their problem and achieve their goals (Tilden & Weinert, 1987). The most distinguish feature of informational support lies in its broad source of provider. Generally, anyone is able to be the provider of informational support as the information is delivered among people by social contact and it can be shared by numerous people. Researches have noticed the informational function of social network in job seeking and career maintaining (Tinago et al., 2021). With the development of cyber technology, internet serves as the largest source of informational support for labor market participation. Study on Indian mothers' freedom of internet use revealed that mothers who have the freedom to use internet have higher possibility to get employed as they are able to access the information of employment (Scott et al., 2021). The study indicates the role of internet plays in informational support for mothers' labor market participation.

Discussion

Based on the systematic review study on the 27 articles selected through a rigorous data selection process, a comprehensive understanding of the current social support for mothers' labor market participation comes out, which uncovers the composition of current social support system for labor market participation of women. With the uncover of the constitution of social support system for mother's labor market participation embodied in the existing literature, the missed component in this system is revealed, which indicates the gap of knowledge in the research on this topic. Therefore, this review points out the direction, and synthesizes knowledge and evidences for future research on this topic related field. Findings of this review is discussed in the following paragraphs.

Overview of researches on social support for mothers' labor market participation

The below-average number of articles detected implicates the insufficiency of research on social support for mother's labor market participation, which reveals that empirical research on this topic related field is in need (Gough, Oliver & Thomas (eds.), 2017). The fragment knowledge identified from existing literature indicates the absence of knowledge about the constitution of social support system for mothers' labor market participation. More specifically, researches on this topic related field in more advanced in developed countries such as Europe, North America and Australia, which is coincidence with the spatial distribution of women's labor force participation rate. According World Bank Gender Data Portal (Figure 4.1), North America and Europe has generally higher female labor force participation rate than other part of the world (International Labour Organization, 2024). The spatial distribution of Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP) rate varies significantly in different countries. For instance, China's FLFP rate is twice that of India despite that both of them are Asian populous countries. This potentially explains that why Chinese researchers are keener on female labor market participation than other Asian countries. Similarly, it is notable that FLFP rate in some Sub-Saharan Africa countries such as Tanzania, Mozambique, Angola and Kenya is higher than 70% whereas FLFP rate of North African countries averagely 30%. Compare to Asia and Africa, there is a smaller difference of FLFP rate in Europe and America, which varies from 40% to 60%. More particularly, North Europe (average 60%) has a higher FLFP rate than South Europe (average 45%), which is similar to the distribution of North America, where FLFP rate for Canada (61.1%) is slightly higher than the United States (56.5%). Latin America has a generally 50% FLFP rate, it is interestingly noticed that Peru and Bolivia have a significantly higher FLFP rate (averagely above 60%) than other South American countries such as Brazil (53.1%), Argentina (50.8%) and Chile (51.8%). The intercontinental variation of FLFP rate indicate that women's labor market participation is associated with various social factors including economic and urbanization development, access to education, government policy, religion and cultural norms, which determine the social perception of women's role. Generally, in traditional and more religious society, women are expected to prior family responsibility to anything else, unless they are not able to survive without working. Women in modern society are encouraged to pursue self-fulfillment and success in career. Therefore, social cultural context should be taken into account in future research on mothers' labor market participation.



Figure 4.1 Spatial distribution of female Labor Participation (FLFP).

In terms of targeted population, it is notable that young, single working mothers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and underrepresented groups, whom is considered as more vulnerable population receive more attention from scholars than others. This finding reveals the limitation of general perception of social support for mother's labor market participation, where social support for mothers' labor market participation is generally perceived as specific assistance in supporting for labor force participation of mothers in vulnerable circumstance, which potentially limit the scope of research on this topic related field. It is conventionally believed that social support is only needed for mothers in vulnerable status, however, the unemployment and occupational downward mobility of women after

transition to motherhood is increasingly seen prevalently despite of social and educational background (Budig, Misra & Boeckmann, 2012; Casarico & Lattanzio, 2023). Therefore, future research on social support for mothers' labor market participation should adopt a more universal perspective of target population, thus provide evidence for the construction of universal social support system for labor force participation of mothers from diverse social backgrounds.

Considering the research context, most of the research concentrate on the assistance in working context, which helps working mothers achieve a balance of work and motherhood including sharing childcare responsibility and career maintenance. In comparison of researches on working context, less attention is paid to the non-working context, where social support is supposed to help non-working mothers restore their career. The increasing rate of motherhood unemployment is observed in many countries in recent years reflects the negative impact of fertility on women's career development (Jones & Wilcher, 2024; Mu & Tian, 2022), which gradually attract attention from scholars and policy makers as it causes negative impact individually and socially. Therefore, attention should be given to the maternal unemployment by future research on social support for mothers' labor force participation.

Constitution of social support system for mothers' labor market participation

Knowledge about social support for mothers' labor force participation detected from the selected articles are fragment, which reflects the multifaceted concept of social support. The selected articles reveal three common measurement of social support (Fondacaro & Moos, 1987): a) perceived social support, which refers to the recipients' subjective perception of assistance they are provided during times of need (Van Gasse, & Mortelmans, 2020; Smith et al., 2021); b) received social support, which refers to the specific assistance offered by the providers (Li & Avendano, M., 2023; Casarico & Lattanzio, 2023); and c) structural social support, which emphasize to what extent the recipient is connected with a social network (Roxo, Porto & Perelman, 2022; Walker & Murry, 2022). By synthesizing the knowledge, this review uncovers the following features of the constitution of social support system for mothers' labor market participation.

Work-life balance centered social support system

Despite the differing measurement of social support based on different research purpose, social support system is constructed on the basis of the need of recipients. In coincidence, the social support system for mothers' labor force participation should be constructed on the basis of mothers' need. The selected articles reveal mothers' need of the balance between work and family. On one hand, women as mother figure have the intention to take maternal responsibility and thoroughly participate in the socialization process of their children, not only due to the social expectation of mother's role, but also as a consequence of intrinsic maternal affection for their children (Díaz, 2022; Roxo, Porto & Perelman, 2022). On the other hand, mothers as individuals aspire to sustain their own career. Working satisfies mothers' multiple needs such as economic independence and self-fulfilment (Li & Avendano, 2023; Dicks et al., 2022). Some articles also reveal the work-family conflict as stressor of maternity stress, which affect mental health condition of mothers (Walker & Murry, 2022). Therefore, the construction of social support system for mothers' labor force participation should integrate the sharing childcare responsibility with mothers' career sustaining and stress coping. The selected articles disclose the intertwined relationship among the three aspects of social support: Sharing childcare responsibility ease mothers' burden of parenting, which enable mothers engage in their work, and the balanced work and family life protect mothers from stressor and ensure mothers' positive mindset. There is a gap of distribution of research on the three aspect of social support system for mothers' labor market participation observed from the selected articles. Among the 27 selected articles, more than half (16 articles) mentioned sharing childcare responsibilities, which greatly exceeds the number of articles mentioned mothers' career sustaining (8 articles) and stress coping (4 articles). This gap indicates the insufficiency of research on career sustaining and stress coping in supporting mothers' labor force participation.

Social support system across public and private sphere.

In terms of provider of assistance for mothers' labor force participation, the selected articles reveal that social support system for mothers' labor market participation is a system across both public and private sphere nowadays. The cross-public and private sphere nature of social support system for mothers' labor force participation implicates the transition of childcare from a merely familial responsibility to a social responsibility with the increasing female labor force participation (Ciccia & Bleijenbergh, 2014; Blum & Dobrotić, 2021). Compared to traditional society where women are expected to stay at home taking care of family, women in the contemporary society have the freedom

to pursue their own career and self-fulfillment, which makes the childcare a sharing responsibility of both family and society. Similarly, women's career sustaining and stress coping is also a matter of both public and private sphere. On one hand, policy is proposed by government to reduce mothers' burden of childcare and stress at work, meanwhile, other institutions put the policy into implementation. For example, daycare center is built for sharing childcare responsibility with working parents, enterprises offer paid parental leave and flexible work schedule for mothers, and some enterprises for fathers. Professional psychological consultation is applied to address maternal stress related mental health issue (Lee, Ruppanner & Perales, 2020; Smith et al., 2021; Mat Pozian, Miller & Mays, 2024). On the other hand, most mothers are reported rely on personal social network such as spouse, kinships and close friends to get assistance for childcare, career sustaining and emotional support (Roxo, Porto & Perelman, 2022; Walker & Murry, 2022). Moreover, as a system, social support for mothers' labor force participation in public and private sphere do not work separately but as a whole, thus the both public and private support practice should coordinate with each other in order to maximize its function in supporting mothers' labor market participation (Dicks et al., 2022). Nowadays, Intelligent Communication Technology serves as a bridge that link the public sector with private life of individuals, which potentially promote the cooperation and coordination between public and private sphere. Therefore, future research on social support should adopt a perspective of system to explore the coordination of public and private social support practice in the context of Intelligent Communication Technology.

Multi-functional social support system

Apart from the nature of work-life balance center and cross public and private sphere mentioned above, the selected articles also implicate the multi-function of social support system for mothers' labor market participation, including instrumental function, emotional function and informational function. Totally 25 of the articles mention instrumental function of social support for mothers' labor market participation, which indicates that researchers are inclined to focus on the direct assistance provided by the social support system, where as other functions of social support for mothers' labor force participation remains unexplored, which reveals the gap in research in fields related to this topic. Compared with instrumental function of social support, emotional and informational functional of social support do not offer the recipients assistance directly, but imperceptibly influential to the outcome of instrumental support for mothers' labor market participation (Tinago et al 2021; Smith et al., 2021). For instance, Tinago et al (2021) uncover the emotional and informational function of community-based peer social support group for adolescent mother, which serves as a platform for adolescent mothers share their experience of childcare, income generating, skill-building and maintenance of physical and mental health, which reveals the crucial role of emotional and informational support for mothers' labor market participation. Therefore, future researches need to explore the under-explored function of social support system for mothers' labor market participation.

Conclusion

The present study reviewed 27 articles about empirical research on social support for mothers' labor force participation to gain knowledge about the assistances currently provided for mothers' labor market participation.

Generally, the spatial distribution of research on social support for mothers' labor force participation is in coincidence with the distribution of FLFP (Female Labor Force Participation) rate. With the worldwide prevalence of women empowerment movement and increasing number of female labor participation, future research on should embrace different cultural context, where there is a diverse perception of women's gender role.

The present review indicates that there is an absence of dominant theoretical framework for research on social support for mothers' labor force participation, therefore, empirical research in this topic should be taken to develop feasible theoretical framework for guidance of future research.

In terms of target population and context, the distribution in selected articles reveals that mothers in vulnerable circumstance such as young, single and low socioeconomic status received more attention from scholars. Besides, most researchers focus on the working context. However, in recent years, the increasing maternity penalty is observed in all socioeconomic and educational background, which requires future research explore more universal population in different context.

The thematic analysis reveals that most existing researches on social support for mothers' labor market participation concentrate on instrumental function of social support such as childcare

responsibility sharing and career sustaining. Other functions of social support such as informational, emotional and appraisal function is neglected by the current research. Therefore, the future research should comprehensively explore the multiple function of social support in assisting mothers' labor force participation. Besides, as social support for mothers' labor force participation is a system that across public and private sphere, future research in this topic related fields should explore the cooperation and coordination of different component in this system, especially in the context of Intelligent Communication Technology.

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