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Supporting Child Growth from an Early Age: A Review of Ten Key Parenting Roles for Young Parents

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Abstract

The high rate of early marriage in recent years is a phenomenon that must be taken seriously by various parties. This problem will continue due to young parents' low readiness level to fulfil their role. Many young parents today lack an understanding of their role in being responsible for the growth and development of their children after marriage. This study uses a literature review, searching through various relevant offline and online references. The results of this study indicate that non-formal education programs, such as parenting programs, can provide a platform for young parents to enhance their readiness to fulfil their roles in addressing issues related to early childhood growth and development stimulation. Parenting programs can provide the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to become effective parents, and they can play a crucial role in supporting the growth and development of children from an early age.

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INTRODUCTION

The increase in early marriage in Indonesia over the past three years should be the centre of attention for various stakeholders. The data reveals alarming trends, despite the efforts to address this issue (Bawono et al., 2022). According to Undang-Undang No. 16 tahun 2019 concerning marriage, early marriage is defined as marriage occurring before the age of 19, which is the legal minimum marriage age established by the Law of the Republic of Indonesia (Zulfa Zuhriyyah Ayudiputri et al., 2024). Based on several studies, it is known that the high rates of early marriage are associated with various factors, including social, economic, and cultural influences, and are closely linked to the education, health, and welfare of girls (Wibowo et al., 2021).

According to data from the Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) and the Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak (KPPPA), approximately 11% to 14% of women in Indonesia are married before the age of 19, which indicates that more than 300,000 early marriages occur annually in Indonesia (Nabila et al., 2022). In 2022, BPS reported approximately 350,000 early marriages, indicating a consistent trend despite declining early marriages in recent years. In 2021, around 400,000 early marriages were recorded, reflecting a slight decrease, but the figure remains notably high (Ratnaningsih et al., 2022). The high rate of early marriage will further impact the readiness of families to fulfil their roles as effective parents to the children born from their marriages.

The family is the primary and most influential environment with which every child is familiar. Parents are the key figures responsible for stimulating the growth and development of their children, who will ultimately become the next generation of the family and the nation (Hasoloan & Rozzaqi, 2022). Therefore, every couple getting married should be prepared to become parents. However, given the prevalence of early marriage mentioned above, it is evident that the readiness to assume parenthood is often insufficient. In response to this, non-formal education, as one of the channels for implementing national education, should play a role in addressing the challenges arising from early marriage. One potential solution is the Parenting Program, a non-formal education initiative that can be offered. Ismaniar & Utoyo (2024) explain that a parenting program is a series of activities or approaches designed to assist parents in educating, raising, and understanding their children. Based on this definition, a parenting program can enhance young parents' readiness to fulfil their roles.

The term "parenting" has been widely heard and discussed at various official and unofficial events, such as seminars, discussions, lectures, or other activities (Nurjanah et al., 2023; Hazizah et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2024). However, to equalize perceptions and better understand the definition of parenting, we should consult the opinions of relevant experts. Based on several references, the definition of parenting, according to experts, refers to the process of caring for and educating children that involves various physical, emotional, and social aspects. Brazelton & Craner (2018) explain that parenting is a process in which parents provide children with love, support, and guidance to help them develop optimally. Based on this perspective, parents who understand effective parenting will try to support their children's growth and development. This aligns with the view of Gilbert & Simos (2022), who explain that parenting also involves fostering emotional skills, where parents help children understand and regulate their emotions. Through parenting activities, parents can develop the knowledge and skills necessary to optimize their role in stimulating their children's early growth and development across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

Parenting activities that can be carried out by each family also have uniqueness and characteristics in their implementation. The educational background, culture, and social life of each family will also affect them. Baumrind (1991) emphasizes that each parent's parenting activities also include different parenting styles, such as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful. Each style has a different impact on child development. Furthermore, the ecological context in which and with whom children interact in daily life will also affect the stimulation of child development. Bronfenbrenner (2013) states that parenting can be viewed as an ecological system, where interactions between the child and the environment, including family, school, and community, influence the child's development.

Based on the issues outlined, this study will explore the role of non-formal education, specifically parenting programs, in supporting young parents to foster the growth and development of children from an early age.

The review includes the following roles:

1. Developing Awareness and Understanding of Children's Needs
2. Providing Love and Emotional Support
3. Apply Positive and Consistent Discipline
4. Cognitive Stimulation and Early Education
5. The Importance of Involvement in Children's Lives
6. Becoming a Good Role Model
7. Supporting Children's Social Development and Interaction
8. The Importance of Physical Health and Healthy Diets
9. Managing Stress and Life's Burdens
10. Developing Children's Independence Skills

KEY PARENTING ROLES FOR YOUNG PARENTS

The parenting role of young parents is crucial in supporting the continuity of children's early development. While young parents may face challenges regarding experience and preparedness, they still have an excellent opportunity to provide positive parenting and significantly influence their child's development. At this stage, young parents must understand that proper parenting can profoundly affect a child's emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development. Figure 1 shows some of the primary roles of parenting for young parents in supporting the continuity of early child development.

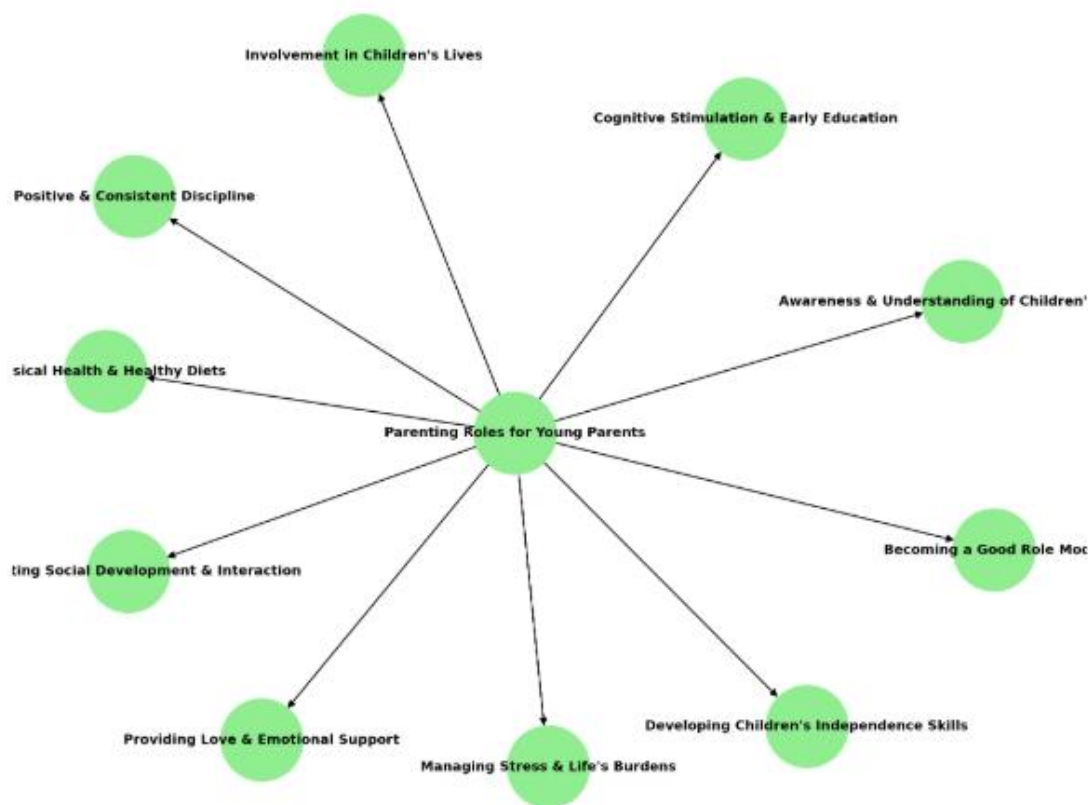


Figure 1. Key parenting roles of young parents in childcare

1. Developing Awareness and Understanding of Children's Needs

Young parents are, of course, new to the experience of parenthood, making it crucial for them to develop a strong understanding of the stages of child development. Knowing children's specific emotional, physical, and cognitive needs of various ages will help them provide appropriate stimulation (Sobel & Letourneau, 2015). Children can learn different types of information in different ways, so making forced-choice answer choices in previous studies analogous to recognition memory tests, such that when presented with test questions, children only need to recognize one of the answer choices, not recall the actual learning event from their memory (Ha et al., 2023).

2. Providing Love and Emotional Support

Every child is born with various needs, not only physical ones such as food, clothing, and shelter but also emotional ones. Moreover, children particularly require love and attention from their parents, especially at an early age. Although young parents are new to this role, they must learn to provide consistent emotional support. Offering hugs, undivided attention, and positive responses to a child's emotional needs will help establish a strong foundation for the child's future social and emotional development. It will also strengthen the emotional bond between parent and child (Kahana et al., 2021).

3. Apply Positive and Consistent Discipline

Children are creatures of habit. They will understand values, norms, and positive and negative behaviour depending on the habits formed by the people in their environment. Young parents need to learn to apply positive discipline gently but consistently in their children's daily lives. Discipline

is not identical to physical punishment. It involves setting clear and consistent boundaries so that children can understand the consequences of their actions (Zuković & Stojadinović, 2021). This helps children learn about responsibility and shape their character. Positive discipline also teaches children to manage their feelings and behaviour healthily.

4. Cognitive Stimulation and Early Education

Optimal cognitive development, in line with a child's age and developmental tasks, does not occur spontaneously. Young parents need to recognize that a child's cognitive development is significantly influenced by early stimulation. The opportunities for interaction that children experience through conversation, play, and educational activities can stimulate their abilities to think, speak, and solve problems (Xiong et al., 2020). Spending time reading books, providing educational toys, and engaging children in activities that stimulate creativity are crucial for developing their cognitive abilities.

5. The Importance of Involvement in Children's Lives

Young children require both physical and emotional affection. Young parents' involvement in their children's lives from an early age is crucial. This includes participation in daily activities such as bathing, feeding, playing together, and engaging in educational and social activities outside the home. Active and engaged young parents provide their children with security and stability (Salgado et al., 2021). This involvement also teaches children to feel valued and cared for, essential for their emotional development.

6. Becoming a Good Role Model

The characteristic of young children's tendency to imitate requires parents to remain constantly vigilant. Young parents are the first role models for their children. Children imitate what they observe, and young parents must recognize the importance of being positive role models in attitude, behaviour, and social interaction (Atif et al., 2022). In this context, young parents can demonstrate problem-solving skills, effective communication, and a positive attitude. This is essential for children to learn how to behave appropriately, face challenges, and interact with others.

7. Supporting Children's Social Development and Interaction

Childhood is a crucial period for developing social skills. Young parents can support this development by encouraging their children to interact with peers or other family members (Kirk & Jay, 2018). Through play, children learn to share, take turns, and collaborate with others. Additionally, young parents can teach children how to express their emotions healthily and foster positive relationships with others.

8. The Importance of Physical Health and Healthy Diets

Young parents must also pay attention to their children's physical health, including providing nutritious food and monitoring their physical activity habits. Good physical health is essential for the overall growth and development of children. Healthy food and lifestyle habits established from an early age will positively impact brain development, the immune system, and children's resilience in the future (Moradell et al., 2023).

9. Managing Stress and Life's Burdens

Young parents often face significant financial, emotional, or social challenges. Young parents must learn to manage their stress to provide the best for their children. Poorly managed stress can affect the quality of parenting (Yang et al., 2022). Therefore, maintaining parents' emotional and mental balance is very important in supporting the development of children.

10. Developing Children's Independence Skills

Giving children the opportunity to become more independent is also an important part of parenting (Cerino, 2023). Young parents can support their children by giving them choices in small matters, such as choosing clothes or food. Through these small things, children learn about responsibility and decision-making, which will help them become more confident and independent in the future.

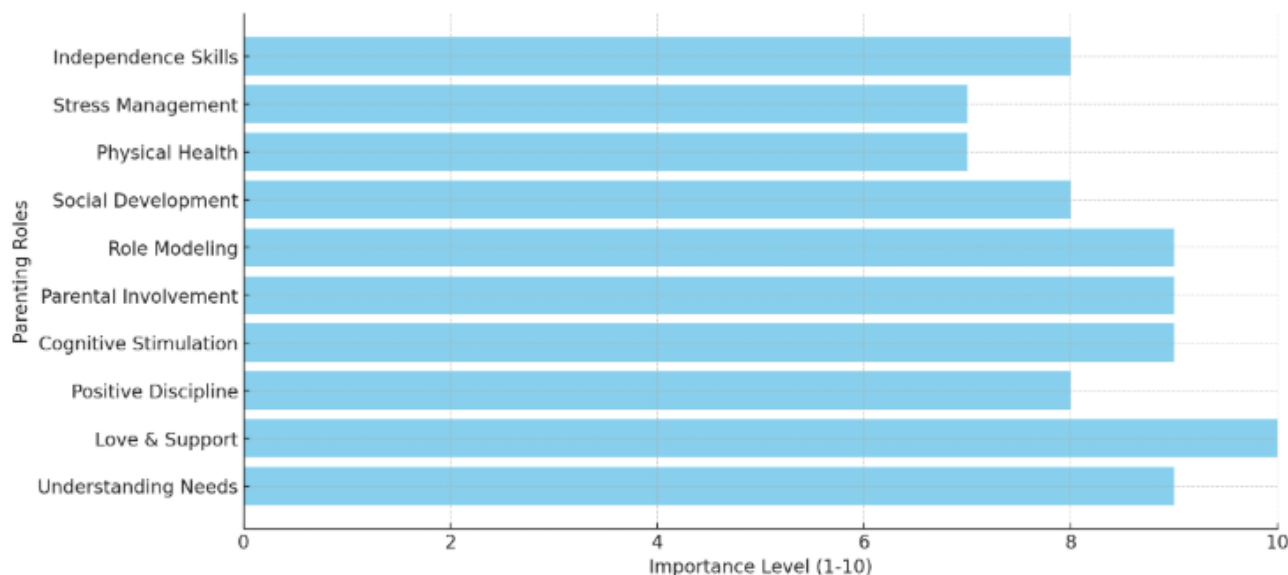


Figure 2. Comparison of parenting roles by important level

Figure 2 compares the importance levels of various key parenting roles for young parents. Each role is assigned a score based on its significance in supporting children's optimal development.

The analysis indicates that **"Providing Love & Emotional Support"** holds the highest level of importance, with a score of 10. This underscores the fundamental role of parental affection and emotional support in fostering children's self-confidence, emotional well-being, and strong parent-child relationships. Emotional security is the foundation for children's future social and psychological development, particularly in early childhood. Following closely, **"Understanding Children's Needs"**, **"Cognitive Stimulation & Early Education"**, and **"Parental Involvement"** each score 9, highlighting their critical role in child development. Parents who deeply understand their children's physical, emotional, and cognitive needs are better equipped to provide appropriate stimulation and guidance. Cognitive stimulation through reading, play, and interactive learning activities fosters intellectual growth, while active parental involvement enhances children's sense of security and social adaptability. Additionally, **"Positive & Consistent Discipline"**, **"Supporting Children's Social Development"**, and **"Developing Children's Independence Skills"** are assigned a score of 8. These factors significantly shape children's behavior, foster social skills, and encourage autonomy. Positive discipline, which focuses on setting clear and consistent boundaries rather than punitive measures, is crucial in teaching responsibility and emotional regulation. Encouraging social interactions and allowing children to make age-appropriate decisions further nurtures their confidence and independence. Meanwhile, **"Physical Health & Healthy Diets"** and

"**Managing Stress & Life's Burdens**" have slightly lower importance scores of 7. While these aspects remain essential, young parents often overlook them despite their direct impact on child development and parenting quality. Proper nutrition and physical activity are fundamental for children's overall health, while effective stress management among parents ensures a balanced and nurturing parenting approach. Overall, these findings emphasize that parenting requires a **comprehensive and balanced approach**. To foster optimal child development, young parents must integrate multiple aspects, from emotional support and consistent discipline to maintaining physical and mental well-being. Awareness of the significance of each role can help parents develop more effective and developmentally appropriate parenting strategies.

DISCUSSION

Based on the literature review, young parents play a critical role in supporting the overall development of their children despite facing unique challenges due to their limited parenting experience. Key parenting responsibilities for young parents include understanding children's developmental needs, providing emotional support, applying positive and consistent discipline, stimulating cognitive development, and actively engaging in their children's lives. Furthermore, being positive role models, supporting children's social skills, ensuring physical health through proper nutrition and exercise, managing stress, and fostering independence are all essential aspects of effective parenting. These factors collectively contribute to creating a secure and nurturing environment that supports children's growth, emotional well-being, and preparation for future challenges.

Responding to the many parenting roles that every young parent must perform in order to fulfil their role in supporting the stimulation of children's growth and development, parenting programs must be presented in non-formal education channels according to the needs and relevant to the times. In the era of rapid information technology development, young parents are faced with new challenges in educating and raising children. Information technology, especially digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, computers, and easy access to the internet, has a significant impact on parenting and family interaction. Therefore, it is important to create a relevant parenting program model that not only focuses on traditional parenting aspects but also considers the influence of technology on child development.

The following are some models of parenting programs that can be adapted for young parents in the information technology era:

Technology-based Parenting Program: E-Parenting. E-parenting refers to using digital platforms and apps to help young parents access parenting information, training, and resources online. These programs can include online courses, webinars, parenting apps, and discussion forums that allow young parents to learn how to parent their children using technology. Several components must be present in a technology-based E-Parenting program, including; a) Parenting apps: Apps like "BabyCenter", "The Wonder Weeks", or local apps that provide tips, advice, and information on child development based on specific ages and stages, b) Webinars or Online Courses: Young parents can attend online training or seminars on parenting topics, which can be accessed anytime and anywhere, c) Discussion Forum and Community: Establish a community of young parents who share parenting experiences and advice on social media or specialized apps so they can get social support and learn together.

Healthy Digital Parenting Program. In the digital age, it is crucial to teach young parents how to use technology wisely and safely in their daily lives. This program aims to teach young parents how to manage technology access in the family and its impact on children. Several components must be present in a Healthy Digital Parenting program, including; a) Digital Literacy Education: This section provides information on internet safety, the importance of parental control over children's internet access, and how to protect children from inappropriate content. It also covers how to utilize technology to support children's education, b) Screen Time Restrictions: Teach parents how to set healthy screen time and provide guidelines on how long children should use digital devices. For example, limiting device use during meals, before bedtime, or while studying, c) Alternative Non-Digital Activities: Encourage parents to create time for outdoor play, face-to-face conversations, or reading physical books with their children as an alternative to too much digital activity.

Community-based Parenting Program. This community-based program promotes direct social interaction and brings young parents closer to the environment. In the digital era, this program can be combined with technology to expand reach and ease of access. Several components must be present in the Community-Based Parenting Program program, including; a) Community Parenting Discussion Groups: Groups of young parents who engage in regular meetings in the neighbourhood or through digital platforms to discuss various parenting topics, share experiences, and learn from each other, b) Offline and Online Parenting Classes: Hold parenting classes, either offline at community centres or online through platforms such as Zoom, that bring in resource persons from various fields (psychology, education, technology) to provide insights on modern parenting in the digital era, and c) Community Family Activities: Organize family events such as family picnics, children's play competitions, or art and creativity classes, which can be done online or offline. These programs help strengthen family interactions and introduce children to their peers in person.

Parenting Programs that Encourage Children's Creativity and Skills. It encourages young parents to focus on technology use and developing their children's creativity and innovation skills. The program teaches parents to provide a balanced environment between technology-based activities and other physical or creative activities. Several components must be present in a parenting program that encourage children's creativity and skills, including; a) Children's Creativity Workshop: This workshop provides arts and crafts-based activities for children, such as drawing, crafts, or simple science experiments that can be done with parents, b) Children's Coding and Programming: Invite children to learn the basics of computer programming or coding through educational apps or games, which can hone their logic and creativity. This can be a fun activity that involves both parents and children, c) Use of Technology for Learning: Educate parents to use technology to educate and entertain children, such as using age-appropriate educational apps or games.

Parenting Program with Mindful Parenting Approach, mindful parenting teaches parents to be more aware and present in their interactions with their children. This approach encourages parents to reduce distractions from devices and technology during interactions with their children and focus more on the quality of the relationship and communication. Several components must be present in the Parenting Program with a Mindful Parenting Approach; a) Mindfulness sessions for parents: Organize mindfulness or meditation training sessions for young parents so that they can

learn how to manage stress, focus on their children, and improve the quality of their relationships with them, b) Gadget-free family activities: Create routines without technological distractions, such as playing board games, exercising together, or reading books. This program aims to strengthen family bonds without interruptions from devices, c) Emotional Education of Children: Engage children in self-awareness exercises in simple ways, such as teaching them to recognize and manage their feelings through simple breathing techniques or reflection activities that can be done with parents.

These parenting programs can be conducted through non-formal education channels, both traditional and using information technology approaches. Implementing these programs must be based on prior identification of problems and needs. This is because each problem and need is unique and requires a different solution. If the level of relevance between the needs and problems and the solutions offered is high, of course, the program offered will have a positive impact, and vice versa.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the study results described, several conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, the high number of early marriages in recent years may have impacted the unpreparedness of young parents to stimulate children's growth and development from an early age. Secondly, the role of non-formal education, specifically parenting programs, in supporting young parents to foster the growth and development of children from an early age; a) developing awareness and understanding of children's needs, b) providing love and emotional support, c) apply positive and consistent discipline, d) cognitive stimulation and early education, e) the importance of involvement in children's lives, f) becoming a good role model, g) supporting children's social development and interaction, h) the importance of physical health and healthy diets, i) managing stress and life's burdens, j) developing children's independence skills. Third, young parents have many parenting roles to play, so they need a program/ platform to develop their knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Fourth, several parenting programs can be organized through a non-formal education approach, both traditional and in line with the development of information technology, including 1) Technology-based parenting program: E-Parenting, (2). Healthy Digital Parenting Program (*Digital Parenting Program*), (3). Community-based Parenting Program, (4). Parenting Program that Encourages Children's Creativity and Skills, and (5) Parenting Program with *Mindful Parenting Approach*.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None declared.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Ismaniar was the lead researcher in the study. She conceptualized the paper, wrote the literature review, and drafted the discussion. Setiyo U, Rembulan C.B.B., and Sri M. contributed to the conceptualization, literature review, and discussion. All authors contributed to writing the introduction, literature review, and discussion.

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