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**ONLINE PLATFORMS AS A SOURCE OF
PARENTS' SOCIAL SUPPORT**

-Qualitative research study in Finland, 2022

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ABSTRACT

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Introduction

Social life has shifted from traditional communities to internet-based online communities. Finnish people have high rates of Internet use, 82% of the population (from 16 to 89 years) accessing the Internet daily. Social support has not only helped mothers to manage everyday life with small children but also it has helped women to cope with the transition to motherhood by limiting and preventing the effects of perinatal depression, (Archer et Kao, 2018). Studies have highlighted the importance of using technology when delivering parenting training, since it has a potential for contacting more individuals and is more sustainable over time. (Spencer, Topham & King, 2020). However, the latest findings also indicate that while social support is an aspect of social media use, users are ambivalent about their relationship with social media. (Archer et Kao, 2018).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine what kind of online platforms and applications parents use in one of the largest cities in Finland and do these tools increase their social support and enlarge their social network. The aim was also to find out if these technology-based tools support and empower their everyday life and parenthood. The targeted audience were parents with children from 0 to 12 years.

Method

There were eight one-on-one interviews, selected through random sampling. Parents were recruited from parent-child-groups and they were interviewed with thematic questionnaires. Interviews were done in November and December in 2020 either in person or via Zoom online call. All the interviews were recorded, as participants agreed it. The length of the interviews varied from 30 minutes to 90 minutes.

Results

There were many aspects that socially challenged mothers. These were especially loneliness, lack of community, exhaustion, and sleep deprivation, managing everyday life, lack of own time, uncertainty, and peer support. Mothers often turned to social media to find out answers to their problems and support for themselves. Mothers were looking for social support both from online and real-life communities. However, the social media groups or the platforms the mothers were part of, didn't satisfy all the need for the social interaction they were longing for. Mothers wanted to have deeper conversations and genuine interactions with other mothers, and large WhatsApp groups and/or Facebook could not meet this need

Conclusion

Management of everyday life, own time, loneliness, lack of community and shortage of activities were interwoven with one another. When one of the components was missing or it was dysfunctional, it reflected directly to all the other areas of life. Nonetheless, when one of the components functioned well, it mirrored positively back to all the other challenges. Despite the active use of social media networking sites, mothers wanted to have supportive social networks in real life. Mothers needed company for themselves and activities for their children.

Key words: family, online platform, parent, social support, well-being

The originality of this thesis has been checked by using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health is an integral and essential component of health. It is more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities. According to World Health Organization's definition, mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to contribute to his or her community (World Health Organization, 1950).

Parents' well-being plays a great role in families' and society's well-being, productivity, and growth and is strongly associated with the well-being of the children (Hakulinen et al., 2019). Previous research has demonstrated the positive effect of in-person parenting programs on increasing positive parent-child interactions, child functioning and parent functioning. Studies have highlighted the importance of using technology when delivering parenting training, since it has a potential for contacting more individuals and is more sustainable over time (Spencer et al., 2020). Studies (e.g., Niemi, 2012) have shown that parents who live together, argue in a constructive way, are emotionally stable and interact with their children, have positive parenting experiences.

Social support is defined as the provision of assistance or comfort to others, typically to help them to cope with biological, psychological, and social stressors. Support may arise from any interpersonal relationship in an individual's social network, (APA Dictionary of Psychology). Social support has not only helped mothers to manage everyday life with small children but also it has helped women to cope with the transition to motherhood by limiting and preventing the effects of perinatal depression, (Archer et Kao, 2018). From the aspect of public and global health, parent's well-being is an important component of both healthy and functioning families and communities around them.

Increased number of new mothers are turning to social media for information and support and to express their difficulties (Horiuchi, 2012). There are multiple social media platforms that parents use daily. Social media platform here associates with the services like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter among the others, but it also comprehends blogs, chats, community message boards and other similar online services. Social support that is received in an online form has many benefits over

physical groups. These are for example access to information, connection, and communication without the need of leaving the home (Archer et Kao, 2018). However, the latest findings indicate that while social support is an aspect of social media use, users are ambivalent about their relationship with social media (Archer et Kao, 2018). 'Facebook generation' which started to use the platform in the very early phase has now become parents themselves. They are used to using social media as an informative tool, so it is important to examine if social media platforms can support their parenthood. Finnish people have high rates of Internet use, 82% of the population (from 16 to 89 years) accessing the Internet daily. What comes to the usage of social media, the most used social media service is WhatsApp with 38% of the respondents and Facebook with 32% of the respondents. (Official Statistics of Finland, 2020). Many mothers and fathers are using social media platforms as a source of support and advice. This thesis will examine how the technology- based tools, applications and social media network platforms support parents' well-being and social support. The reader should bear in mind that the study was conducted during the first fall of Covid-19 pandemic outbreak 2020, thus it might have some impact when observing for example the feeling of loneliness and activities that mothers wanted to attend or the new friendships they were aiming to build.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Parenthood is often a season of life that changes both mothers and fathers. It challenges, demands, and gives more than can be imagined, and gives no possibility or time to practice it in advance. A tiny human being, with the constant need of care and affection, transforms thoughts and actions towards the unknown. Heavily based on the mysterious life of a new-born and transition to parenthood, it is no wonder that a first time-parents may experience feelings that are unfamiliar and unexpected

The main goal of parenting has not changed, but the environment and the society around has. Many parents in urban surroundings are assumed to manage it all alone, when extended family members may live faraway. The trend of intense parenting has increased, and parents are demanding more from themselves and their children. The assistant professor of sociology and women's studies at the University of Virginia, Sharon Hays, defines intense mothering to be child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive and financially expensive (Hays, 1998). Socially mothers and young children are very often isolated from the other adults (Parker, 2005). This sadly is even more highlighted in our society today. Parenting was never intended to be done alone. For hundreds of years the support of family, extended family and community has always been there for the new parents. Being constantly attentive and adjusted to the needs of someone else for whom one has total responsibility all the time is a baffle (Raphael-Leff, 2010). 'The culture of intensive parenting contains an isolating dynamic, where the individual parent's 'parenting-strategies' are seen to directly determine the health, safety, and well-being of the child. In this way, intensive parenting culture works towards the idea that child caring should be conceptualized as a generational responsibility, whereby all adults can and should play a positive role in shaping the next generation' (Lee et al., 2014). This gives a very clear impression that building community- centered parenting and intensive parenting, aren't working simultaneously. Both beliefs want the best for the child, but the intensive one rather creates burnouts for the parents than increases their well-being. Large social networks are normal for humans. Studies have shown that even small children can form relationships with up to 20 adults (Mäkelä et al., 2019). Social support has not only helped mothers to manage everyday life with small children but also it has helped women to cope with the transition to motherhood by limiting and preventing the effects of perinatal depression (Archer et Kao, 2018).

2.1 Social media parents

There are many ways of being a parent in an online world. According to the previous study (Duggan, Lenhart et al., 2015) a large share of parents finds social media as a general information source, and they use it as a parenting tool among the other options. The research done among the American parents, indicated that mothers and fathers used social media also to offer each other social and emotional support. Generation Y and millennial mothers use mobile technology to recreate their village, which here means the networks that traditionally existed in personal connections with friends and family members. Mothers increasingly turn to the Internet as a supply of community to communicate, connect and share life with other mothers (Lorin et al., 2016).

According to Riva (2010) social network can meet many needs on an individual level, defining the use of the internet as an optimal experience. Social networks can answer to four different dimensions which are: Offering support, self-expression, search for support and voyeurism. Therefore, social networks that exist in online communities can work as a tool to support the social connections, or as a tool to express our social identity or as a tool to analyze the social identity of others.

Social network can be determined using the following definition:

- “1. The presence of a ‘virtual space’ (forum), in which a user can create and present their own profile. The profile needs to be accessible, at least in partial form to all users of the space.
2. The possibility to create a list of other users (network) with which one can get in touch and communicate
3. The possibility to analyze the characteristics of the network, in particular, the connections of the other users. “

(Riva et al., 2016).

The way how multilayered interaction is provided (many-to-many, one-to-many, one-to-one) and the use of many different components in websites might define the way how parents feel supported. What comes to online communities that offer parenting support, most of the studies focused on pregnancy,

first time parenting and young children and on health-related topics. Peer support was a topic of its own in cases where parents themselves had experienced something specific in their own aspects of parenting, such as illness of a child or pregnancy related issues. Anonymous support was given and received via online networks (Riva et al., 2016). Many parenting programs have switched to online communities, and organizations can offer many kinds of program types. These can include self-guided and non-guided, online, and face-to-face support and combinations of all of the mentioned.

Parenting is today more influenced by social media than ever before. Social life has shifted from traditional communities to internet-based online communities, even though feelings of connectedness and belonging may differ or even be absent in oversaturated social media. Social interactions are observed through screens and mobile phones, but peer-support doesn't exist on the same personal level compared to the circumstances, where face-to-face interactions are provided, although the struggles and dilemmas might be the same. On the other side, social media and the possible anonymity within it, can build the environment where saying difficult things aloud, or even issues that are commonly regarded as shameful or ambivalent, can be expressed for the first time without the fear of being judged. Nevertheless, there are concerns that web-based information is not accessible by families that face the greatest barriers to accessing "traditional" face-to-face parenting support. These families therefore could benefit most from online approaches. The Internet provides an enormous opportunity for delivering evidence-based parenting support to a broad range of parents (Baker et al., 2017).

Previous studies show that those who spend a lot of time in Facebook, tend to compare more their lives with others as those who are not so active Facebook users. This might lead to unrealistic expectations when active social media users keep thinking that others have better and happier lives than themselves. Research conducted by Hammond & Chou (2016) observed especially people who were having an intimate relationship, but it also emphasized the findings that if people get a lot of attention and sense of belongingness from their online community, it might reflect negatively on their intimate relationships, and they are less motivated to maintain it. Frankly, Facebook was also regarded as a place to withdraw when facing problems with spouses. It gave a sense of acceptance and support by the online friendship community (Riva et al., 2016).

The more parents used social media, the more likely they were getting social support from there. According to a large Australian study, the background of the parents or the challenges they were facing, did not play a critical role in receiving and experiencing social support. Instead, the time spent in the social networking platforms correlated to the received amount of support (Haslam et al.,2017). Virtual communities have played significant roles in providing support for parents. Yet there is not much research about how virtual-based communities actually support parents (Lu, 2019). Although there are many effective online parenting programs, most of them do not provide a social component which would lead to possible experienced social support (Haslam et al.,2017).

2.2 Aspects about social support

Daily decisions of any given subject are nowadays more and more influenced by the internet and social media. Many young mothers find social networking sites to be important sources of social support (Carlin et al.,2019). Social support can be categorized into two main areas. These are structural support and functional support. Structural support involves both formal and informal social relationships when functional support is the certain type of perceived support. According to Sherbourne and Stewart (1991) there is a model of five functional elements which occur in functional support. These are: 1) emotional support through understanding and the encouragement to express feelings, warmth , nurturance and reassurance; 2) informal support via advice and guidance and helping another to understand; 3) instrumental support through material, monetary and behavioral aid, tangible assistance, services, specific aid or goods ; 4) appraisal or comparison support relates to encouragement and advice by those who have been in similar situations and 5) social companionship by spending leisure time with others (De Sousa Machado et al., 2020).

When studying the topic of this thesis, social support in this case is especially under the element number four, which reflects the social support received from the parents' who are or who have been in similar situations but also element number five, where social companionship by spending leisure time with others is important, since many parents were especially looking for a like-minded company from the online platforms. How effective and well-matching the social support is in real life, depends on a lot from the people, their needs, backgrounds, and experiences.

Nevertheless, the main role of the social support is to protect the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of those exposed to stress. The risk for psychological stress increases if an individual is not able to communicate the type of support they need in an adequate way or they lack the relevant social networks (De Sousa Machado et al., 2020).

According to a qualitative systematic review of the literature (Dennis et al., 2006), it was found out that mothers preferred social support that would empathize them. In other words, they preferred receiving support from other women with children, which they felt that shared the same experience and provided genuine understanding (De Sousa Machado et al., 2020).

Even it might be easy to think that finding social support is not a very hard task, there are some barriers that can prevent mothers to getting it. Hong Law (2013) and Negron (2013) identified two main areas which are: Self and Societal. In terms of self, many negative thoughts and believes of self and own capacity of being mother might affect mother's possibilities of seeking social support. In terms of societal, first-time mothers might lack reliable information about the realism of the postpartum period.

Hong Law at al. (2013) also emphasized how social media can worsen the idealization of motherhood and how others are observed. This has a direct implication on mothers who might struggle with the pressure of ideal motherhood. As De Sousa Machado et al. (2020) suggest the further research should focus on the use of devices and technologies women use in their everyday life and how social support manifests there. It is important also to consider the positive and negative impacts of social media networks and applications. Comparatively little research has been conducted into the use of social media as a source of social support in parenting context (Haslam et al., 2017).

2.3 Social support as a health determinant

A human being is a psychological- physiological and social creature and all these aspects have an impact to one's health as well. According to World Health Organization, health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 1948). Social support has been regarded as a vital indicator that predicts health outcomes.

How parents receive and experience social support, will predict their parenting practices and their own understanding of children's mental health (Zhang et al., 2022).

The interviews of the thesis were conducted during the Covid-19 outbreak, which was termed a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. This is important to take account when reading the answers of the participants since there were many exceptions in an everyday life that prevented mothers and children to enjoy the life and social contacts as they were before during the pandemic outbreak. According to Keller et al. (2022) “The effects of the corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) have led to long-lasting and profound changes in human interaction, human health behavior, and mental well-being.”

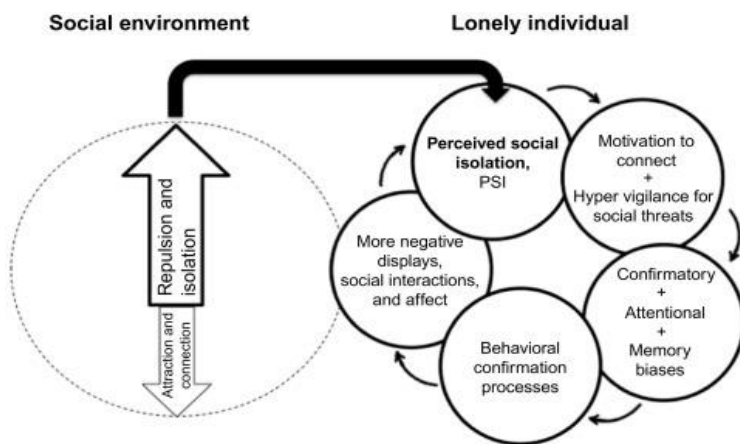
Previous studies have shown that parents have shown greater vulnerability in experiencing loneliness during the pandemic. Many parents have worked from home, constantly switching between their work duties and parenting (for example regular parenting responsibilities and homeschooling during school closures). Simultaneously the government advised everyone to reduce social interactions, because it was regarded as the most effective way of preventing the infection. However, it increased the parenting burden even more. (Weissbourd et al., 2021)

2.4 Loneliness and its effects on individual

“Loneliness has been defined as “a distressing feeling that accompanies the perception that one's social needs are not being met by the quantity or especially the quality of one's social relationships” (Keller et al., 2022). The opposite of the lack of social support is loneliness. Loneliness can lead to negative long-term psychological effects. According to Zhang et al. (2022) individuals who perceived less social support, may feel lonelier later in life.

Cacioppo & Cacioppo (2018) have developed a theory of loneliness. It provides a theoretical explanation for the perception of loneliness. Based on the theory, when feelings of loneliness appear, it can affect an individual's psychological and mental health. Theory describes that social isolation or loneliness has been termed as a signaling function that simulates physical pain. It also describes that people have a strong need to connect to others to obtain and provide protection against possible danger. If people don't get fulfillment for their need for social connection and interaction, people may therefore report feeling lonely (Cacioppo et al., 2009).

According to evolutionary theory of loneliness, some ways to reduce the feeling of anxiety, are low threshold digital or face-to-face networks that can provide adaptive and adequate coping strategies that can help in overcoming loneliness. Also, people should be encouraged to become involved in more social contacts either face-to-face or in a digital mode to alleviate their feelings of loneliness (Cacioppo et al., 2018).



Picture of the evolutionary theory of loneliness by Cacioppo et Cacioppo, 2018

2.5 Peer support

Peer support is a defining feature that shares a same social identity and creates the feeling of solidarity. In online environment social network can offer expertise from different fields, interactivity among the users and both social distance and control (Riva et al., 2016). De Sousa Machado (2020) defines peer support as ‘the provision of emotional, appraisal and informal assistance to address a health-related issue of a stressed focal person’. Peers are mothers who have experienced similar kinds of challenges and are regarded as advisors and supporters to help to cope in a challenging situation.

As well as in my own research, it is notably to keep in mind that some of the mothers who were looking for social support from the online communities, were either ‘posters’ or ‘lurkers’ as defined in Riva’s (2016) research. ‘Posters’ are the active users who give and receive support and ‘lurkers’ are the users who follow the conversation but don’t give any input in it themselves. Parents can also ‘lurk’ in a context of following multiple pages and groups and by doing so, gather information or reassurance

from reading posts, but not actually post anything by themselves or making any interaction with other parents on the same site (Haslam et al.,2017).

In an Internet based social media networks, there are much larger circle of parents online at any given time than in real world face-to-face meetings. This might make it easier for parents to ask advice from other parents who have already successfully solved the similar parenting challenges and are available to offer now support and advise.

3. OBJECTIVES AND STUDY QUESTIONS

The objective of this study was to examine what kind of online platforms and applications parents use in one of the largest cities in Finland and do these tools increase their social support and enlarge their social network. The aim was also to find out if these technology-based tools support and empower their everyday life and parenthood. The targeted audience were parents with children from 0 to 12 years.

The study questions:

1. What are the major social challenges of parenthood?
2. How do parents connect and communicate with each other?
3. What kind of on-line service(s) parents are using to empower their parenting skills?

4.METHODS

4.1 Method of the study

The interviews to conduct the study were one-on-one interviews, selected through voluntary response sampling. There were only two criteria to get involved in the research. One was the participation of 'Kimpassa' groups, and the other criteria was having at least one child. Parents from parent-child-groups were interviewed with thematic questionnaires. The interviewees were recruited from 'Kimpassa' groups by Tampere Missio after permission from the director of the Missio. The goal of Tampere Missio is to eradicate loneliness and empower communities. They organize parent-child groups in various locations around Tampere city, where parents with their babies until 1 year old can attend. The goal was to get a minimum of five parents to anonymously answer the research questions, preferably 10 parents. The researcher gave short introductions about her study in four different group meetings in different city districts and the volunteers who wanted to join the research were asked to give their email address, thus the researcher could contact them later. The open invitation was given approximately to 40 mothers.

4.2 Introduction of the data

A Total of eight volunteers were interviewed in November and December in 2020 either in person or via Zoom online call. All the interviews were recorded, as participants agreed it. Out of the eight interviews, six were done in cafeterias and two via Zoom call. Seven participants were living with their spouses and one of the participants was a single mother. There were four families with only one child and three families with more than one child. The youngest child was four months old during the interviews and the oldest one was four years old. All of the participants had an academic degree.

The interviews were recorded with a cell phone. The length of the interviews varied from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. The interviews were littered after recording. The interviews were done anonymously, and the interviews were given individual tags from P1 to P8 in order to separate the different people from each other; P1 meaning the participant 1 and so on. Before the interview, everyone signed the permission for the research they were attending to and they were told about the research, its' goals, and the anonymity. Participants were also provided with the information about the smartphone application that was under development and that was supposed to be released in future and about its' aim to help the families to communicate with each other and organize and host activities together.

4.3 Analytical process

The main research method was qualitative content analysis. The qualitative content analysis is one of the many qualitative methods that are available for analyzing data and interpreting its meaning. It represents a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena (Elo et al., 2014). The research questions define what to analyze and what to create. Qualitative content analysis can be used both as a deductive or as an inductive way. Both alternatives include the same main phases, which are preparation, organization, and reporting of results (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Thematic research provides a much wider environment to go through the research questions and possibility to go deeper in conversations instead of using a semi structured interview template. The content analysis in this thesis is inductive since there are no existing theories behind the research that needed to be tested in here.

All the recordings were littered and then analyzed. Analysis was made with thematic analysis, first listening through the interview materials, and then iterating them when in a written form. In the iteration process research questions were written down. After this, different answers were written down around the mind map and based on the similarities they were color coded. For example, when asked 'What kind of online platforms do you use to support your parenting practices? Some mothers answered, *"Well, I'd say, different kinds. Sometimes just plain information, so that I want an answer*

from a professional “. Then all the same answers were circled with color blue. These answers were regarded as the codes. After many mothers answered the same, it became one of the defining themes. After identifying and coding the data, eventually six defining themes were formed.

Here’s an example, how the codes and themes were conducted

Data	Code	Theme
<p>Interview No. 7 Mom with one child, 4 months old Lives with a spouse Education: University level degree</p> <p>Q: What kind of online platforms do you use to support your parenting practices ? →Color coded with blue</p> <p>Q: What are you looking for from the online platform or smartphone application? → Color coded with yellow</p> <p>A: ‘Well, I’d say, different kinds. Sometimes just plain information, so that I want an answer from a professional. There’s a lot of info like that, like peer knowledge, and sometimes that’s very good. Like if you’re thinking this baby has this and then the others are saying, ‘Yeah, yeah, we had exactly that, too!’ So I’d say the advice from a professional, and sometimes also the advice from the peers is enough, so I don’t need the facts ‘cause others have had it, too... so I don’t need the doctor’s opinion then. ‘(P7)</p> <p>A: ‘And then there’s these chat groups, chats, this mother-peer group thing, so those you’ll find on WhatsApp and Facebook. ‘(P7)</p> <p>A: ‘What I have noticed is that it’s us mothers who spend time on social media, no fathers there. So, dads are at work and moms at home, so we have time to hang around there. ‘(P7)</p>	<p>-Facebook, WhatsApp, chats and chat groups</p> <p>-Information</p> <p>-Peer knowledge</p> <p>-Mother-peer group</p> <p>- Flea market and different supporting groups from different fields of interest</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Finding support and advice both from other parents and professionals •Use of multiple different online platforms and tools and that are easily reachable •Social spheres of everyday life have shifted from community-based communication to online platforms •Support for one’s parenting styles and practices in a form of information and peer support

<p>A: 'Well, I use Facebook for all sorts of ... I mean, there's everything there. Like the flea markets, the Breast Feeding Support Group, the Emmaljunga groups, and ... clothes ... all this The July Babies ... The 2020 Babies, I'm in all of them. Sometimes I feel like my life consists of only those baby-related posts on Facebook. And there's the kids' sleep group... there's something for everyone. And that is also what we like to share between us moms, like 'Are you in this group already?' For example the kids' sleep group, Come over here, there's some sensible stuff here!' And then some of those groups are a bit ... you need to be pretty critical, I mean, some of it might sometimes go overboard.' (P7)</p>	<p>-Groups where there are mothers with babies of same age</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to filter the information based on the groups and the participants • being supportive towards each other in conversations and chats but also learning to be critical when needed —> BIG theme; Peer support
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5. RESULTS

Most of the mothers experienced very similar challenges in their everyday lives. These struggles defined the six major themes that the interviews brought up. These were loneliness, exhaustion and sleep deprivation, management of everyday life, uncertainty, the pressure that social media creates for mothers and peer support.

5.1) Social challenges of parenthood

Loneliness

Mothers experienced loneliness when their baby was born if they didn't have any existing social support networks near their homes. Most of the mothers were used to having a vivid social life before the baby was born. Turning into less social after the baby was born felt untypical for many.

Becoming a mother for the first time created a sense of loneliness even without a global pandemic if the relatives lived far-away and there were not so many friends who would share the same situation. If mothers didn't have strong social networks around them, they found it hard to come up with activities what to do with children during the days. Especially first-time mothers regarded it as a struggle, when trying to find ideas what to do with the baby. Mothers with more than one child didn't mention this as a problem, since there were older siblings who created the busyness in their days. Interviewees also mentioned that having adult company during the daytimes would ease their days and perhaps reduce the stress of what kind of activities to do with a small child and children.

'Well, one thing that came to mind right away, which is probably because of the situation in the world, too, a kind of loneliness. Having picked a people job on purpose, I like being around people every day. So, yes, loneliness has been a thing that I've been talking about with my friends a lot. Although you have this little person around you, you can't actually share your thoughts with anyone. So, all day long, you'll be waiting for the husband to come home from work. '(P1), one child

'Well, probably the fact that you feel pretty lonely from time to time, 'cause we don't have friends with kids. So, you are kinda wondering if you can find some company and something to do during those days. So, I guess that may be the biggest challenge... ' (P2), one child

'Or that with both of my kids, I've been lucky to have a good friend on maternity leave and parental leave at the same time. And that's been really important 'cause I'm the kind of person who doesn't only wanna stay at home, and I like to have someone to call or write to and ask if they wanna go have lunch or go for a walk or something. So, that's really important for me. So, if you don't have a friend like that, the day will be like really long when everybody else is at work and you're trying to think of what to do. ' (P6)

'Yeah, these Corona times, these circumstances make it sort of challenging, so you are thinking what if we can't meet each other anymore, or ... me, I'm this kind of an extroverted mom and those square meters ... and the spouse working from home, so I am used to going to all kinds of activities and ... yeah, we have been to all kinds of activities and things, so if there's going to be a lockdown again or something, so that's what I've been thinking about... ' (P7), one child

Lack of community

Mothers wanted a group of people, a community around them. Very often the days spent with a small baby, whose interactions were still quite monotonous, and the time used for sleeping was quite long, highlighted the importance of social interactions for a mother. However, if there were no other babies or mothers on maternity leave in the nearby community, mothers tried to find new mom-friends from the Facebook or WhatsApp groups. The results were not always very successful. Mothers wanted to have friends who were like-minded and shared the same interests. Online groups were quite large but when the intention was to find friends who could be contacted and met in real life, it became a more

challenging environment to operate. For example, only a fraction of WhatsApp group members were active users.

'Well, maybe to find a kinda better network close by, to get friends to live nearby, so that you could like go for a walk easily. There's always so much hassle trying to get friends from all around Tampere to come go for a walk and find a suitable time for everyone... '(P2)

'Well, yeah, that, or actually I have already gotten quite a lot of company for myself, but maybe it's that you'd find something to do and sort of find people that are like you. '(P3)

'If you think that there's something like 5000 people in that (Facebook) baby group, and 25 of those are in this baby group (authors note; smaller group which is formed from the large group, based on the cities where mothers live. Communicates via WhatsApp) , which is actually surprisingly many. Out of those 25 maybe six come regularly to meet, and we have agreed on organising a pre-Christmas party together, and 11 people are coming. So that the ratio is really low. But it's something anyway. '(P8)

Covid-19 outbreak brought up new challenges to social interactions. Since the virus was quite novel and there was not much information on how it manifested among the small children, mothers desired to meet the same group of mothers instead of visiting a new mom group weekly.

'And also, I've joined these (online) baby groups in western Tampere 'cause I wanted to see if I could find people like me there, so that there'd be some ways to... but it's been kinda disappointing that I haven't found any company. So, I have tried other channels then... '(P3)

'I think it would be great to find groups where the same people get together regularly (P4)

Mothers stated that their own parents lived in different cities, and they could not get support from them regularly. Mothers had an idea that they could get help with childcare via purchased services if no one else could come and help them. One of the often-mentioned organizations was The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (MLL). Nevertheless, mothers had never used the short-term childcare services the MLL offered. Mothers explained that when their children would be older, it would be more convenient to hire a babysitter.

'This baby is pretty easy to take care of, but I feel that I have people around me that I can ask, and then there's the organisations. For example The First Born –Home Service and the MLL, so I think, yes, help is available, for free or for a price.' (P7)

'But when the baby is a bit older, we have been thinking about hiring someone through the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare or something like that. Since the grandparents are so rarely available for us.' (P1)

'Then there's, of course, the MLL (the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare), so that you could hire someone to look after your child, but that would mean letting an outsider into your home. And that feels like too big a step right now, maybe when the kids are bigger.' (P6)

Mothers who had more than one child notified that finding a company for their children was challenging. Current GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) protects personal privacy so much that even sharing other parents' contact information at the daycare was prohibited. This causes a lot of extra work for parents when aiming to maintain their children's social life.

'And once, I was trying to get the contact details of my daughter's friend, and I was told that 'A's mother has orange hair!' So I decided to write my contact details on a piece of paper and leave it in that child's locker in kindergarten, hoping that they'd contact me... It has also happened to me that they (my daughter's friend's parents) never contacted me, and then you kinda think, what's going on. (P8)

'So I was at a children's playground, and my daughter was playing with this other girl there, and she happened to be there with her dad. When we were leaving, I went up to him to ask if I could get his phone number, since the girls were playing together so nicely, so we could meet again. So, after a couple of weeks I messaged him again, saying we'd be coming to that park again, so if their daughter could come play with us, so the answer was that he couldn't message single women, and that he couldn't come. ... So, I thought this was... it never even crossed my mind that I'd be hitting on him, I was simply looking for a playmate for my daughter. So exactly, you cannot even ask a stranger for their phone number, even if you'd met them at a children's playground.' (P8)

Exhaustion and sleep deprivation

Mothers acknowledged that baby's sleep or sleeping patterns caused them challenges. Sleep deprivation was one of the most common challenges of new parents. It was hard to prepare for it in advance but much easier to recover when the baby started to sleep for longer periods. One of the mothers who suffered from sleep deprivation was a single mom of two small children. She especially pointed out the importance of sleep and rest when children are small. Also, when not having a spouse, she said that the help that comes outside of the house, even in a paid form, was precious and extremely important for her own well-being. Too often parents tried to survive by themselves on the edge of exhaustion and sleep deprivation. Partly it can be explained through the Finnish culture, which regards it as a virtue of being an independent caregiver. Some of the mothers mentioned that different sleep training methods had helped their babies to begin to sleep better. This also relieved mothers' own exhaustion.

'But then there's this typically Finnish self-sacrificing mentality, like 'a Finn will do anything to get there, if there's a will there's a way', so I've seen a lot of this mentality. And sometimes you see it on those chat forums, too, like 'well, this was just one of those horrible nights'. So, ... then there's a lot of those nights and you go through hell trying to figure out what to do. People should pluck up their courage to say that they need help. There's also this sleep training for babies, and there's plenty of ads on social media. But, so if you're an exhausted mom or dad or foster parent or whatever, you could go and find help there. (P8)

Managing everyday life

When the baby, especially the firstborn was born, mothers explained that their everyday life had shifted from predictable to unpredictable. Creating routines in everyday life with a small baby seemed to be challenging particularly if there were no or very little scheduled activities with but also it took time to get to know the newborn baby and adjust to his/her character and temperament. However, mothers were hoping to find more routines and scheduled activities during their maternity leaves. Especially mothers of first-born child addressed that life was not any more as predictable as it was before. Mothers of more than one child expressed their concerns when they needed to transport themselves to different places, especially during the wintertime, when children needed a lot of different layers of warm clothes. Mothers explained how they have started to plan everything in advance and how they have begun to allocate more time for certain tasks to be in certain places on time. Nevertheless, in mom group gatherings it was totally fine to be a bit late since everyone shared the same struggle and there was greater understanding towards each other.

'Well, I dunno... This baby needs a lot of pre-planning, compared to my earlier life. If you have a baby activity that day, you have to get up a lot earlier and anticipate everything.'

So, it takes a lot of systematical planning of your schedules. Though, I am the kind of person who can do that, but you are no longer the master of your own schedules, so you have to take some extra time to... and in mother groups, it's ok to be late. Luckily, I'm pretty good at sticking to timetables. '(P7)

Lack of own time and challenges in managing own time

Mothers pointed out that having some time alone or without kids was important. It did not need to happen daily, or it did not need to be scheduled, but a small moment without supervising the children and overseeing their well-being, refreshed the mothers. For someone the time spent alone with the spouse was even more important than time spent alone. If there were other family members who were able to take care of the child, mother or both parents could have time alone when needed and scheduled beforehand. Mothers preferred their spouses or their own parents or parents-in-law as secondary care givers for their babies. Either being too hesitant to leave the child with other caregivers or not having a clear goal of what to do with their own spare time, prevented mothers from taking time for themselves. Mothers also reported that they already had their own time, when the child was napping or sleeping.

'Well, my me-time is when N sleeps in the afternoon. And now that the baby only takes one nap during the day... earlier it was two. So, if I have some errands to run or something, I can go when the baby is sleeping 'cause my husband is working from home. But most of the time I spend that time resting. (...) I should just go... but actually, I haven't otherwise asked anyone to take care of the baby to have some me-time for myself. '(P3)

'It'd be in the evenings when the children are asleep, that's when. A couple of hours per evening perhaps, and yes, so on weekends too, if the husband has a free weekend, too, you could go somewhere to get your mind off things, but then again, you might want to spend time as a family. So, you'd have time, but you wouldn't know what to do with it. '(P5)

During the very first months of a baby's life, mothers found it hard to organize their own time. Whether they were breastfeeding their baby or not, seemed to define if they were able to spend their own time or time alone with the spouse during the very first months of baby's life. Those who breastfed were more reluctant to leave the baby with another caregiver during the first six months of the baby's life. Those, whose babies could drink milk from the bottle as well, had more time for themselves even during the first weeks after the delivery. For mothers to organize their own time, the reasons should have been so important and somehow critical that it would motivate the mothers to coordinate the babysitting schedules and do all the work that organizing one's own spare time would have required.

'Yeah, sure, I could have even more of that, but I haven't figured out a rhythm for it yet, and also, I don't think I could think of much to do without the baby. So that I should have a place to go or things to do... '(P2)

'My husband is also the kind that he sometimes says to me: 'Maybe you'd better go out somewhere a bit. You haven't been anywhere for a long time.' So yeah, I tend to be the kind of person who needs a nudge to go out somewhere like for an hour or so. But then I say: 'Nooo, I could do some laundry! But the he says: 'No, you are going now! (laughter). 'You don't need to busy around the house all the time!'' (P6)

'Somehow, it's like you just go with the everyday life. (...) Somehow, you don't have the heart to be away.' (P3)

For a single mother the home assistance service was precarious, therefore she could have some time for herself. Even though she needed to pay for the service, she said that it was the best investment she could do for her own mental well-being.

'Yeah, so if I had a husband, I'd probably just give the kids to him to take care of, but that's not possible. I have someone coming over to help once a week for three hours at a time. That's between 8 am and 4 pm. Sure, it costs some money, but I'm prioritising my mental health there. I need it and I can spend the time doing what I want: I can go out if I want, or I can just sleep if I feel like it. So, that's pretty much how I get my free time. '(P8)

Mothers valued their own time but were also simultaneously concerned that their spouses had some time alone too. There was also discussion about how motherhood has become one of the 'new roles' that mothers of firstborns have needed to adapt to. Sometimes even the realization that there is 'no way out' from motherhood created some extra pressure. However, being aware that they still could have time for themselves and join some activities without the children, gave them a sense of control over their own life.

'Well, maybe the fact that you are so stuck with the kids now, so your own needs come second. That's maybe one challenge... '(P5)

'And... yes, there's the thing about your me-time. ... Now that you have turned into a ... now that you are a mother 24/7. When the baby was away, it was wonderful, of course, when you got to be yourself pretty quickly. It was just a little thing that helped you to remember 'this is what I'm like, as a woman and as a person.' (P7)

'But you can't leave this role of a mother just like that. ... You can leave when you make arrangements, but not necessarily just like that. I have been taken by surprise by how over-whelming that role is, but I've still been able to be myself, and that has been positive. '(P7)

Yes, I do, and I feel that I can have me-time whenever I want to. And what I find even more important than me-time is us-time, so that the baby is away and we get to spend time together, just the two of us, my husband and me. (P7)

Uncertainty

Especially first-time mothers reported uncertainty when the baby was born. Everyday life suddenly became unpredictable since everything was new and unknown. The needs of the baby and their own inexperience resulted in uncertainty. If a baby did not eat well or the baby's sleep was disrupted, first-time mothers found it hard to tell if it was something small that would pass by soon, or if it was a matter of making an appointment at the healthcare center. Facebook groups were considered as affirmative tools when mothers were facing uncertainty. Mothers with more than one child addressed uncertainty as well but more in a sense of unpredictability. They emphasized the sudden changes in everyday life, for example if children became sick during the night, they knew it would change all the previously made plans and schedules. Very often mothers of more than one child become very flexible with rapid changes and they have learned to be quite adaptive in new situations.

'(...) What else would there be... well, maybe some sort of uncertainty. Like, thinking if I did everything right. Or if there's a day when the baby takes the naps at the wrong times and then eats nothing, and I am thinking if I should make an appointment to the doctor, yeah, more or less! So, a kind of uncertainty about what's going to happen next. Every day is so different. (P1)

'Maybe a kind of uncertainty, like you'll never know, or like, before the kids, you could plan things so that I'll do this and that tomorrow. But now, with the kids, you might actually end up having one throwing up at night, and so you'll have to figure out the whole palette again from the start. So a certain, I don't know the right word for it, but a kind of unpredictability, and that everything may change all of a sudden, and then you just have to adjust and replan.' (P6)

Peer support

Most of the interviewee's own parents were still active in working life, so only a very few got support from them or from their siblings. One mother explained that they moved to Tampere from another city only because her parents were retired and lived now in Tampere. By doing so, they were able to get much more help and support for her and her husband's everyday life.

Peer support was regarded as a vital resource for mothers. Mothers were looking for peer support from face-to-face meetings they attended, from the smartphone applications or from the social media platforms they were using. One person even reported that sometimes peer support is considered as a more reliable source of information compared to fact-based knowledge. Peer support was highly valued, and mothers were sharing advice and tips with each other. When becoming a mom, the peer support seemed to gain a new level of trustworthiness in sharing resources and information. Mothers were keen to continue the discussion in real life as well. Sometimes this became a challenge when the original discussion took place on the internet and then connecting with possible real-life-friends was not that easy. There were sometimes even hundreds of mothers in Facebook and WhatsApp groups yet building new and meaningful friendships via these platforms was not easy. Mothers explained that they were active in these online groups and wanted to encourage each other or share some advice with other mothers since they said that they themselves had got so much support from the online community. But there were also mothers who said that they never comment or start any conversation online.

Oftentimes solely the awareness that there were other people who share the exact same situation, was enough for mothers. Even the comprehension that there were other mothers whose child didn't sleep well last night, comforted other mothers who struggled with the same issue. Parent-child group activity that happened on a weekly basis was also a great real-life support for many. Every now and then there were different themes to be discussed in the gatherings. Mothers reported that they felt lonely during the maternity leave. Paid maternity leave in Finland lasts 9 months. It can be shared with the father but only one of the interviewee's had shared the 9 months with her spouse. The shift in social environment compared to working life was so big that loneliness was one of the major challenges that affected parents' everyday life. Mothers who had friends who also had children and with whom they could spend time together, reported that as a great benefit. Without these friends, days became very long and

lonely. Coming up with the idea, what to do with the children, became much easier as well, when there was another mother, who could introduce activities both for parents and children. Mom- friends were also the ones who demonstrated support towards each other. In some mom groups just the shared agenda of motherhood was regarded as a form of support, even if the participants would share different world views and opinions about other issues. Other moms were found trustworthy and mutual respect and understanding was high.

‘But for me, it’s been peer support, so that you get to talk about the most important things in the world, for example, how many diapers with poop you change in a day. That you can talk about things that, on one hand, do not matter at all, but on the other, are important for you. But then another thing is my life outside home, the fact that, luckily, I also have friends who don’t have kids. And the first thing they ask is not how my child is doing. Like when I go home to my parents’, their first question is always: How is the baby doing? How is he/she growing? Has he/she been eating enough?. Instead, my friends are also interested in how I am doing.’ (P8)

‘And yeah, then there’s these WhatsApp groups where you could also find peer support, so that you’d have people you could meet, but then, some of the groups are where nobody answers anything. So, in one of those groups, we, the active ones, left the group and started a new one for ourselves. So, why do people join a group if they don’t... ? ‘ (P3)

‘ And when we go to all these activities, mother-baby groups or friends of the family. Like I said earlier, the atmosphere there is very supportive, you support each other there. For example we make different choices when it comes to feeding the baby, sleep and so on. But everybody supports everyone else’s choices, and that has been really great, I think.’ (P7)

5.2 Digital connection and communication among the parents

Mothers reported that smartphone applications were the foundation of all their communication.

WhatsApp was the most used communication platform. Almost everything needed to be communicated between the mothers in advance. Even borrowing some flour from the next-door neighbor was regarded as an event that needed to be communicated before one could go and ring the doorbell. Ex tempore visits to friends' houses barely existed anymore. Interviewees explained how they used WhatsApp for private messaging but also how they belonged to one or multiple messaging groups where they either were just silent observers or active communicators.

Motherhood and social media

Mothers used social media platforms to search for the information, for inspiration and for social reasons. Information was mostly searched from Facebook and Instagram. Facebook wasn't regarded as a component that would create any pressure to motherhood. Most mothers experienced frustration if they belonged to many subgroups in Facebook and could not find the information they were looking for or find the peer support that they were longing for. Facebook was mostly used as an informative platform instead a place to connect with new friends. In Facebook mothers were looking for the answers to their problems or existing discussion about the following topics: Information about breastfeeding and baby's sleep, Information that supports parenthood and is related to parenting, Peer Support, Kids' second hand shops, Baby groups based on the month they were born in (babies born in November, July etc) Baby 2020 group for everyone who were pregnant in year 2020 and Things to do with the kids.

'No... I dunno, well, I have joined some Facebook groups now, like if I wanted to find out about breast feeding, so I joined the Breast Feeding Peer Support Group, or about sleep issues, there are some good

groups there, with actual discussion. I think it feels somehow more trustworthy to be on Facebook than to go on a website and browse through the chats there.' (P1)

'Well, I use Facebook for all sorts of ... I mean, there's everything there. Like the flea markets, the Breast Feeding Support Group, the Emmaljunga groups, and ... clothes ... all this The July Babies... The 2020 Babies, I'm in all of them. Sometimes I feel like my life consists of only those baby-related posts on Facebook. And there's the kids' sleep group... there's something for everyone. And that is also what we like to share between us moms, like 'Are you in this group already?' For example the kids' sleep group, Come over here, there's some sensible stuff here!' And then some of those groups are a bit ... you need to be pretty critical, I mean, some of it might sometimes go overboard.' (P7)

Mothers were using Facebook even in a form of entertainment:

'Well, yes, I have sometimes, you know, just for fun, 'cause there's this crazy stuff sometimes... (...) so I sometimes go there for entertainment ... especially, which I didn't mention earlier, on those Facebook groups, when people talk about their own experiences... so, yes, I go there for entertainment, for a feeling of drama.' (P7)

Instagram was considered more as a social media platform that boasted perfect lifestyles. Mothers felt inferior when they on purposely or without even knowing it compared their own life with the others. However, the older the parents were the less they compared themselves with the others. Experience in life and in parenting seemed to bring confidence to live the life that reflected their own values. In addition to only sharing highlights from one's life, Instagram also provided informative platforms and resources for the parents via the professional accounts.

These accounts were managed for example by parents who were specialized to certain types of issues themselves based on their own expertise or experience.

'(...) And then nowadays some people, when you go on Instagram and look at some family's account, you see nothing but great fun, and they do all those wonderful things together, and their kids never have tantrums in public places. This content is very common these days, and then I am, like, I haven't even changed out of my night gown the whole day. And we're wearing these soiled clothes, and somebody ought to clean the house. And then you see those people just travelling there on Instagram.' (P1)

'This thing about comparing your life to the lives of the Instagram moms is not something that I relate to. I feel it's perhaps more common among younger mothers... And I'm not that old either, I'm 34 and not twenty-something. So, I've seen that happening more among the people who are younger than me. I like following posts with everyday realism 'cause I mostly spend time with these two little ones.' (P6)

5.3 On-line service(s) parents were using to empower their parenting skills

Empowerment can be defined as authority or power given to someone to do something. Also, the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights. In a sense of empowerment, peer support and social networks of other parents can be seen as empowering tools of parenthood. Mothers were using smartphone applications that tracked baby's sleep and applications that followed pregnancy and child's development until they were 2 years old. However, most of them stopped the use after the baby was born. Their main goal was to find information about the pregnancy and child's development. Facebook was regarded as the most famous online platform what comes to themes considering parenting.

'Yeah, maybe all of those, and then especially in the beginning, information when you didn't know anything, like if it's normal that the baby does this. Is it normal that I breast feed x times a day? Or at what age should it be bathed and how often? Things like that. I mean, information in the beginning. A bit later then, peer support, like, so nice to hear that they woke up so many times during the night, too,

And now that the baby is older, maybe information and peer support go more like hand in hand. You sometimes get some new info.’ (P1)

‘Peer support is the biggest thing at the moment, and the second may be that you look for something to do with the kids or somewhere to go. That’s probably the most important things you look for.’ (P5)

‘Well, maybe it’s been the peer support, and the sleeping rhythm app was good in that it had things that worked for us and explained why it’s worth doing like this and maintaining the certain rhythm. So, in this way, the information is also really important.’ (P6)

Nonetheless, motherhood alone did not make anyone an expert in parenting but when exploring further, it was even more important to find someone, with whom life could be shared and reflected. When discussed about the different applications that mothers used to empower or support their parenting skills or parenthood, none of them mentioned any. Only applications that they found helpful were the ones that tracked baby’s sleep and others that followed baby’s development from the embryo until the baby was born. All the other needed information they were trying to find from Google, Facebook or WhatsApp.

‘Well, I’d say, different kinds. Sometimes just plain information, so that I want an answer from a professional. There’s a lot of info like that, like peer knowledge, and sometimes that’s very good. Like if you’re thinking this baby has this and then the others are saying, ‘Yeah, yeah, we had exactly that, too!’ So I’d say the advice from a professional, and sometimes also the advice from the peers is enough, so I don’t need the facts ‘cause others have had it, too... so I don’t need the doctor’s opinion then.’ (P7)

'I have mostly used Facebook to get peer support. There's a baby group there, and then there's like the July babies' own group, those I have followed. This may not be totally relevant here, but in the July Babies Group there's also a baby group with 25 people, which is on WhatsApp. And those people come from the Pirkanmaa Region, so that I have seen them and it's more like concrete peer support, so that it's not just the social media world.' (P8)

'And then there's these chat groups, chats, this mother-peer group thing, so those you'll find on WhatsApp and Facebook.' (P7)

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Discussion of the results

This research brought up the many aspects that socially challenged mothers. These were especially loneliness, lack of community, exhaustion, and sleep deprivation, managing everyday life, lack of own time, uncertainty, and peer support. Mothers often turned to social media to find out answers to their problems and support for themselves. Loneliness was not something that mothers expected to experience during their maternity leaves. They thought that the baby would bring them company but realized quite fast that the little baby was not very social in the very first months. Instead, mothers tried to learn to schedule their lives around the little one's napping times. If mothers had a friend who was simultaneously on a maternity leave, it eased their everyday life tremendously. Sometimes sleep deprivation and exhaustion prevented mothers to leave the house and join some activities with the baby. This reflected also to their management of their everyday life, if they were too tired to meet anyone, or innovate some activities for their older children. Mothers wanted to have some time for themselves but found it hard either to leave the baby with the other caregiver or then come up with the ideas of what to do with their own time. Uncertainty was experienced when mothers were not familiar with the new situations that everyday life with the children unexpectedly brought to them. Many of these social challenges mothers experienced had an impact on one another. As Duggan et al. 2015, stated in their research, the main goal of parenting has not changed, but the environment and the

society around us has. A large share of parents finds social media as a general information source, and they use it as a parenting tool among the other options. This was also true to this research, mothers used social media and all the subgroups it offered as a source of information. Sometimes the information they got from the social media from another mother was regarded even more reliable than the advice they would get from someone else. As Horiuchi (2012) stated earlier, increased number of new mothers are turning to social media for information and support and to express their difficulties. Also, in this research it was noteworthy that mothers were looking for like-minded company, peer support and advice from the social media. Mothers were not looking for these things from the communities they lived in or from the parks they visited or from the child health center they had appointments to.

Mothers were looking for social support both from online and face-to-face meetings. Mothers who were interviewed were on maternity leave and they talked about the loneliness and social changes it had brought for them. As Bartholomew et al have stated, social media, specifically, allows mothers to stay connected to their peers and friends and have a sense of a social life during a time in which they are likely taking some time off from work and spending less time engaging in in-person social activities (Bartholomew et al., 2012). However, the social media groups or platforms the mothers were part of, didn't satisfy all the need for the social interaction they were longing for. Mothers wanted to have deeper conversations and genuine interactions with other mothers, and large WhatsApp groups and/or Facebook could not meet this need. Many said that they belonged in to too many groups. It became hard to pick the critical information and big groups provided only a few face-to-face encounters, which was one of the top priorities for the mothers.

As Moon et al., 2019 found out, many young mothers find social networking sites to be important sources of social support. Nevertheless, based on the interviews in this research, mothers wanted to meet other mothers in real life as much. Not only via social networking sites. Interviews took place at the end of the year of 2020 when the Covid-19 outbreak was still in an ongoing phase. There were some longer lockdowns in Finland during the Spring 2020. It influenced interviewees' everyday lives since the recommendations about the safe distance, face masks and gathering restrictions were still valid. This created perhaps more reserved attitudes toward new social situations and contacts.

Finnish extrovert culture brought up its own challenges when aiming to build new relationships. All the interviewees were Finnish and yet they reported awkwardness in Finnish small talk and intentions of getting to know other people better. Even if the mothers shared the common situation about having a small child and staying at home with the child or children, still finding like-minded people in real life was not easy. Social support was critical for mothers' well-being and yet it was not always easy to access. However, accessibility to online social support was easier than face-to-face encounters, even those physical settings created a more natural place for social support. After the Covid-19 outbreak, it resembled that the social space among the Finns had become even larger. Visits in each other's houses without scheduling it in advance hardly existed anymore and many interviewees were afraid of being too intrusive when asking other mothers for a walk or for a cup of coffee. Mother's loneliness and the lack of social support is a particular concern for public health as well. Postpartum depression has a direct impact on health and well-being. Many mothers wanted to have more face-to-face interactions on a weekly basis. Most of them had also settled for managing everyday life with scarce resources but I believe it can be partly explained through the Finnish culture, which regards it as a virtue of being an independent caregiver. Covid-19 also had an effect when mothers tried to plan their own time. Most of them wanted to go to gym or other exercise activities but even most of the gyms closed their doors or strongly restricted the group fitness classes. Nevertheless, one good thing that many mothers mentioned about the pandemic, was that their husbands were able to work remotely and by doing so also supporting and helping the mothers.

Those who became first-time mothers, were looking for much more information from online than the mothers who already had children, understandably. Parenting wanted to be 'done' as well as possible, which reflects the definition about intensive parenting which Hayes explained earlier in the theoretical background. Even if the parents wanted the very best for their child, intensive parenting, where parenting requires a significant amount of time and money, became very consuming. The resources where the parents could find information and support for their parenting skills were quite narrow. None of the interviewees mentioned any applications that would empower their parenting skills. This raised the question if there actually were any? If yes, they have not reached the large masses yet. For support and empowerment, Google, and Facebook, especially Facebook, were among the firsts and most widely used resources among the interviewees.

6.2 Reliability

There are different ways of thinking the reliability of the qualitative content analysis. Two useful distinctions that are used and were created by LeCompte and Goetz (1982), are external and internal reliability. Internal reliability concerns the degree to which other researchers applying similar constructs would match these to data in the same way as original researchers. External reliability, further, concerns the replicability of entire studies: would other researchers studying the same or similar settings generate the same findings. When aiming to improve the external reliability, it is important to take account the five issues that can have an impact to the reliability. First, identify the particular status position taken by the researcher in the field. Secondly, researcher should say as much as possible about who offered data and, thirdly, the social situations in which this was done. this way, any attempt at replication might follow up similar contacts. Fourthly, LeCompte and Goetz promote that a full account is given of the theories and ideas that informed the research, also including those which were involved in any coding schemes. The fifth point includes attention to methodological reporting, with a detailed account of all aspects of methods used. LeCompte and Goetz (1982) define internal reliability as the degree to which other researchers would match given constructs to data in the same way as original researchers. They give also give instructions how to augment this. Five objectives are: use low-inference descriptors, use multiple researchers, use participant researchers, peer examination and record data mechanically (Seale, 1999). What comes to the reliability of coding, the goal was not to fix meanings too early in the analytic process since this might have hindered the creative thought and block the capacity of seeing new things.

6.3 Ethical issues

All the interviews were provided anonymously and there was no need for a statement by an ethical board. The results were reported as a group result, thus no individual will be recognized. The permission for the study was given by the director of Tampere Missio. Good ethical practices, according to Finnish Advisory Board on Research in Integrity were considered. Research followed the principles that are endorsed by the research community. These are integrity, meticulousness, and

accuracy in conducting research, and in recording, presenting, and evaluating the research results. Research has been conducted according to the responsible conduct of research. Honesty and integrity have been adopted in all the research activities. The researcher has taken account of the work and achievements of other researchers by citing their publications correctly and giving credit of their achievements in carrying out the researcher's own research. The researcher has complied with the standards set for scientific knowledge in planning and conducting the research, in reporting the research results and in recording the data obtained during the research. (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity)

7. CONCLUSIONS

This study offered some important insights into the concept of social media and the challenges it created both for the first-time mothers and mothers of more than one child. Many young adults moved to different cities for study and work. When they become parents themselves, it is very likely that their family members still live faraway. The need for belonging to somewhere is very critical for everyone. This emphasized the importance of peer support and the new community that mothers aimed to build around them. Supportive social networks improved mothers' well-being and helped them to cope in everyday life. Mothers were looking for a like-minded company from the social media, but it was not always easy to find new real-life friends from there.

Management of everyday life, own time, loneliness, lack of community and shortage of activities were somehow interwoven with one another. When one of the components were missing or it was dysfunctional, it reflected directly to all the other areas of life. Nonetheless, when one of the components functioned well, it mirrored positively back to all the other challenges. Despite the active use of social media networking sites, some parents were still lacking supportive social networks in real life that would help them to manage the challenges of parenthood and helping them to adapt the new requirements that life with small children brings.

Communication between the mothers happened via WhatsApp and in social media platforms. There was no sign that the mothers would decrease the use of social media when becoming parents, vice versa, they joined different baby and parenting related groups in Facebook and in WhatsApp. Parents used social media platforms, networking sites and smartphone applications to support and empower their parenting. They were looking for the advice, peer support but also like-minded company for themselves. The village that used to exist in communities and neighborhoods has transformed to an online village where everyone has access to, but which is yet more uncertain in terms of finding help, advice and new friends that could be meet in real life too.

For further research it would be very interesting to interview some stay-at-home fathers as well. Now, social media and its channels and platforms are strongly controlled by mothers. I wonder how the tone of the conversations or impression of social support would change if fathers were more active participants. Also, what are the reasons that fathers are absent in these platforms? How could they be invited to engage in such topics? Like one of the participants well said:

'What I have noticed is that it's us mothers who spend time on social media, no fathers there. So, dads are at work and moms at home, so we have time to hang around there. '(P7)

Before the interviews, the participants were informed about the smartphone application that was going to be developed for the families. The aim of the application is to increase social connections between families, enabling them to communicate as a family with other families and create activities for children. During the interviews the application was not yet ready, but still almost every participant asked when it would be in available for downloading.

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9. APPENDIX

Haastattelukysymykset Pro-gradu-tutkimusta varten Tampere Missiossa, syksy 2020, Annina Rautalahti

1. Minkä kokoinen perhe sinulla on? Minkä ikäisiä lapsia sinulla on?
2. Oletko töissä vai vanhempainvapaalla? Minkälainen koulutus sinulla on?
3. Minkä verran käytät erilaisia vanhemmuuteen tai lapseen liittyviä sovelluksia/ nettisivuja?
4. Mitä haet eniten sovelluksesta? (Tietoa, vertaistukea, reflektiota omalle toiminnalle jne)
5. Mitä kolme asiaa sinua haastavat vanhemmuudessa eniten?
6. Mistä asioista saat tukea vanhemmuuteesi?
7. Jotta arki toimisi haluamallasi tavalla, mitkä ajankäyttöön liittyvät asiat haastavat sinua eniten?
8. Millä tavalla yleensä hoidat kommunikoinnin muiden vanhempien kanssa?
(Mitä viestikanavia käytät?)
9. Onko sinulla omaa vapaa-aikaa? Millä tavoin järjestät aikaa itsellesi?

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TUTKIMUSLUPA-ANOMUS
22.9.2020

Tampere Missio
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Hyvä Missio Tampereen järjestöjohtaja,

Opiskelen Tampereen Yliopistossa, Yhteiskuntatieteiden tiedekunnassa kansainvälistä maisterintutkintoa ' Master's Degree in Public and Global Health'. Opintoihini kuuluu pro-gradu-tutkielman teko. Työni aiheena on tutkia internetpohjaisten sosiaalisten sovellusten merkitystä vanhempien hyvinvoinnin tukena. Haluaisin haastatella Kimpassa- perhetoiminnan vauvaryhmistä vapaaehtoisia vanhempia. Haastattelut ovat puolistukturoituja haastatteluja, joihin toivoisin saavani mukaan enintään 10, mutta vähintään viisi vanhempaa.

Haastattelut kerätään loppuvuoden 2020 aikana joko yksittäis- tai pienryhmätapaamisina. Haastattelut ovat anonyymeja ja kerättyä aineistoa käytetään pro gradu-tutkielman tekoon sekä älylaitte pohjaisen sovelluksen kehittämiseen vanhempien yksinäisyyden lieventämiseksi, perheiden välisen kommunikaation parantamiseksi ja mielekkään vapa-ajan organisoimiseksi lapsiperheiden kesken. Pro gradu-ohjaajani toimii professori Marja Kaunonen. (marja.kaunonen@tuni.fi)

Pyydän kohteliaimmin lupaa tutkimuksen suorittamiseen

Annina Rautalahti