



Strategies of Working Parents in Fostering Secure Attachment in Early Childhood



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the primary strategies employed by working parents to foster secure *attachment* in young children amidst time constraints. The background of this study is based on the increasing number of working parents, which has the potential to affect the quality of emotional interactions with children during the crucial early developmental period. The study employs a qualitative, descriptive approach to understand parents' subjective experiences within the context of daily life. The research subjects are working parents with young children, selected through purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, supported by observation and documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results indicate that working parents employ parenting strategies focused on the quality of interaction, namely maximizing *quality time*, establishing consistent daily routines, and maintaining warm, responsive, and open emotional communication. These strategies allow children to continue feeling their parents' emotional presence despite limited time together. Thus, the formation of *secure attachment* is not determined by the length of time spent together, but rather by the quality of interactions that are consciously and consistently built by working parents.

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1. Introduction

The social changes and economic conditions of recent years have had a significant impact on family life, particularly on how parents raise their children. Currently, an increasing number of parents are both working in various fields. This is not only due to the family's growing economic needs but also because of shifting perspectives on the roles of men and women, leading to women becoming more actively involved in the workforce (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This situation results in less time spent together between parents and children due to the daily demands of work.

Limited time spent with children is a critical concern in early childhood care. Early childhood is often referred to as the "golden period" because during this stage, children's growth and development occur at a rapid pace and lay the foundation for their future lives. During this period, children develop across various domains, ranging from social and emotional skills to other abilities. One crucial aspect that begins to form during this period



is a secure emotional bond, or secure attachment, between the child and the parent. Secure attachment plays an important role in shaping children's sense of security, self-confidence, emotional regulation, and future social relationships (Hong & Park, 2012; Bowlby, 1969).

Recent studies in the Indonesian context indicate that working parents often experience challenges in balancing work responsibilities and children's emotional needs. Nevertheless, responsive parenting, emotional availability, and consistent interactions remain important factors in supporting children's emotional security and attachment development (Kurniawati & Fauziah, 2020; Utami et al., 2021; Prameswari, 2025). A stable emotional bond between a child and their parents does not simply emerge on its own but is built through consistent, warm, and attentive interactions (Cenceng, 2015). In this process, the role of parents as the child's closest figures is crucial. However, modern family life often forces working parents to face various challenges in carrying out their parenting responsibilities. Busy work schedules, job demands, and physical and emotional exhaustion often affect the quality of time spent with children. This situation raises concerns because limited time with children can reduce the emotional closeness that should be well-established.

Although time spent with children is limited, this does not necessarily prevent parents from forming a secure emotional bond with their children. Several studies indicate that the quality of time spent together is more influential than the duration of time spent with children in fostering healthy and positive relationships (Gea & Malelak, 2024; Utami et al., 2021). This means that even with limited time, interactions characterized by full attention, caring attitudes, and positive responses still have a positive impact on children's emotional development.

Based on the results of initial observations and pre-research interviews conducted by the researcher at the Sekar Nagari UNNES Early Childhood Education Center, it was found that the majority of the students' parents are working parents, leaving them with little time to spend with their children. Their occupations vary widely, ranging from private-sector employees, merchants, laborers, to public service workers. This situation means that time spent meeting and interacting with their children is more often limited to the morning before starting work or the evening after returning home from work. Despite these time constraints, some parents still strive to maintain an emotional bond with their children through simple activities, such as playing with them after work, having a chat before bedtime, and establishing daily routines together.

On the other hand, the findings of the observation indicate that some children have a significant emotional need for their parents' presence. This is evident in the children's behavior, such as wanting to stay close to their parents, seeking attention when their parents return from work, and exhibiting mood swings when left alone for too long while their parents are at work. This situation indicates that the emotional relationship between working parents and young children is a crucial area for further research, particularly regarding how parents' strategies in fostering secure attachment or a secure emotional bond with young children.

In this context, parenting strategies play an important role in maintaining emotional closeness between parents and children. Parenting strategies refer to parents' deliberate efforts to build positive, warm, and responsive interactions with their children (Riawan et al., 2022). For working parents, these strategies may include quality time, consistent daily routines, emotional communication, physical affection, and active involvement in children's daily activities. Such interactions do not merely emphasize the amount of time

spent together, but rather the quality of emotional engagement provided during parent-child interactions (Utami et al., 2021). Warm communication, attentiveness, and consistent routines can help children feel emotionally secure, valued, and understood (Fauziah et al., 2022).

Theoretically, this study draws on attachment theory proposed by John Bowlby (1969) and later developed by Mary Ainsworth (1978). This theory explains that secure attachment—or a safe emotional bond—can form when a child has a sensitive, responsive, and consistent primary caregiver who meets their emotional needs (Cenceng, 2015). A parent's ability to understand and respond to a child's cues and needs is crucial in fostering a sense of security in the child. Thus, the quality of interaction between parents and children is considered more influential than the amount of time spent together.

Previous studies have shown that working parents can still build secure emotional relationships with their children when appropriate parenting strategies are implemented (Prameswari, 2025; Qomariah, 2019). Several Indonesian studies have also discussed parenting patterns, emotional development, and parent-child communication in working families (Kurniawati & Fauziah, 2020; Utami et al., 2021). However, most previous studies mainly focused on the effects of parental employment or general parenting styles, while limited studies specifically explored how working parents apply daily-life parenting strategies to foster secure attachment in early childhood. Therefore, further research is needed to provide a deeper understanding of how working parents maintain emotional closeness with their children in everyday family life.

Furthermore, every family naturally has different conditions and dynamics in fulfilling the dual roles of parent and worker. Differences in job types, socioeconomic status, and the values upheld within the family can influence how parents raise their children. Therefore, research is needed to explore parents' experiences and perspectives in greater depth so that the strategies used to build emotional bonds with children can be better understood. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it can provide a more comprehensive picture of this phenomenon based on real-life situations in daily life (John W. Creswell, 2014).

Based on this explanation, this study focuses on the strategies employed by working parents to foster secure attachment in young children. This study also examines how parents understand and implement quality time, daily routines, and emotional communication as part of their parenting strategies. The objective of this study is to gain a deep understanding of the strategies employed by working parents to foster secure attachment in young children amidst their time constraints. It is hoped that this study will yield benefits, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study can expand knowledge regarding early childhood parenting, particularly within families where parents work. Meanwhile, practically, this study is expected to serve as a guide for parents in building more effective interactions with their children. Additionally, this study can serve as a basis for educators and relevant parties in supporting parenting approaches that prioritize children's emotional needs.

Thus, this study is closely related to the current conditions of modern family life. Understanding appropriate parenting strategies is crucial to ensure children continue to receive adequate emotional support, thereby allowing their growth and development to progress optimally, both socially and emotionally.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the experiences and parenting strategies used by working parents in fostering secure attachment in early childhood. A qualitative descriptive design was considered appropriate because this study aimed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of participants' real-life experiences and daily parenting practices within their natural context. This approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the strategies employed by working parents in fostering secure emotional bonds (secure attachment) in young children, particularly amidst time constraints. Through the qualitative approach, the researcher can explore participants' experiences and perspectives more comprehensively, reflecting the realities they face daily.

This study positions the researcher as the primary instrument (human instrument) responsible for data collection through to the data analysis stage. The researcher was present directly in the field and interacted with participants to obtain more in-depth data that aligns with the research context. Throughout the research process, the researcher sought to build an open and comfortable relationship with participants so that the information provided was natural and reflected actual conditions.

This study was conducted at the Sekar Nagari UNNES Early Childhood Education Center, which was selected through purposive sampling because it has parents of students working in various fields. The research activities took place over three months, from February to April. The selection of the research location and time was based on the researcher's ease of reaching participants and the suitability of the location to the research focus being examined.

The research subjects were working parents with children aged 0–6 years. Participant selection was conducted through purposive sampling based on several criteria: (1) parents working outside the home with fixed working hours, (2) having young children, (3) willing to serve as informants in the study, and (4) able to provide information openly. This study involved five working parents as research participants. The number of participants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, in which the collected data showed recurring patterns and no substantially new information emerged. Although the number of participants was limited, qualitative research emphasizes depth of information and contextual understanding rather than statistical generalization.

The study data consists of qualitative data focusing on the experiences and parenting strategies employed by working parents. The collected data includes: (1) parents' strategies for creating quality time with their children, (2) the implementation of daily routines with their children, (3) forms of emotional interaction between parents and children, and (4) how parents cope with time constraints in parenting. Research data is sourced from primary data collected directly from participants, as well as secondary data in the form of documentation related to the study. Data collection was conducted primarily through in-depth interviews, as this method was deemed capable of eliciting participants' experiences and perspectives in greater detail. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, guided by an interview guide designed to align with the study's focus. In addition to interviews, the researcher also conducted participant observation to directly observe the interactive relationships between parents and children in their daily lives. Documentation techniques were utilized as supporting data to complement and strengthen the research findings.

This study used instruments in the form of interview guidelines and observation sheets prepared based on indicators aligned with the research objectives. These indicators cover

aspects of quality time, daily routines, emotional communication, and parenting strategies employed by working parents. Before use, the instruments were first reviewed by experts (expert judgment) to ensure the content aligned with the research focus. Before being used, the interview and observation instruments were reviewed through expert judgment by two lecturers in the field of early childhood education and qualitative research methodology to ensure the relevance and clarity of the instrument contents in relation to the research objectives. During the data collection process, the researcher also flexibly adjusted the instruments to suit the circumstances and conditions in the field.

Ethical considerations were carefully maintained throughout the research process. Before data collection, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, interview procedures, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Participants provided informed consent prior to the interviews. The researcher also ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of participants by not disclosing personal identities in the research findings. All collected data were used solely for research purposes and stored securely by the researcher.

Data analysis in this study employed thematic analysis. The analysis process involved several stages: (1) transcribing interview results, (2) thoroughly reading and understanding all data, (3) coding the data, (4) grouping codes into main themes, and (5) interpreting the data to draw research conclusions. The analysis stages were conducted iteratively to ensure more consistent and in-depth data interpretation. Data validity is tested through methodological triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail. Methodological triangulation is conducted by comparing data results derived from interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking is performed by asking participants to review the interview results to ensure the collected data aligns with their actual experiences. Meanwhile, an audit trail is the process of documenting all research steps in a structured manner so that the research process is accountable and easily traceable.

3. Results and Discussion

This study aims to identify the strategies employed by working parents in fostering secure emotional bonds (secure attachment) in young children. The research focuses on how parents maintain emotional closeness with their children despite time constraints due to work. Based on in-depth interviews with five working parents, it was found that time constraints do not always hinder the formation of secure attachment in children. Parents still strive to maintain an emotional bond with their children through various basic interactions that occur routinely in daily life.

Quality Time and Emotional Presence

The research findings indicate that working parents recognize the importance of maintaining emotional closeness with their children despite having quite demanding work schedules. Most participants reported that they still tried to set aside special time for their children despite their busy work schedules. The activities they engage in with their children are diverse, such as playing together, helping children with their studies, eating together, watching television, and accompanying children to bed at night. Parents utilize this limited time to remain emotionally present in their children's lives. These findings align with research indicating that quality time spent with full attention can help strengthen the emotional bond between parents and children (Gea & Malelak, 2024; Utami et al., 2021).

One participant stated: *“Even though I come home tired from work, I still try to spend time talking and playing with my child before bedtime because I want my child to feel close to me.”* (Informant 2) Some participants also explained that after returning from work, they still made an effort to spend time talking or playing with their children despite physical exhaustion. Several participants intentionally reduced smartphone use while interacting with their children to ensure more focused and meaningful communication. In addition, some parents used weekends to engage in simple activities with their children, such as walking together, cooking together, or playing at home. These findings indicate that working parents continue to prioritize emotional closeness through meaningful interactions with their children.

The findings revealed that participants interpreted quality time as meaningful moments of emotional connection despite limited interaction time with their children (Gea & Malelak, 2024). Children feel more valued and cared for when parents are emotionally present in daily interactions. This helps children build a sense of comfort and security with their parents. These findings are supported by research by Jennifer L. Hook & Ann Meier (2009), which revealed that the quality of interaction has a greater impact on emotional closeness than the length of time parents and children spend together.

Daily Routines and Consistent Interaction

In addition to spending *quality time together*, working parents also build emotional bonds through daily routines that are carried out consistently. Based on the interview results, most informants have specific habits with their children, such as hugging their child before leaving for work, saying goodbye when parting, reading a bedtime story, praying together, and having light conversations in the evening. Although they may seem simple, these routines serve as a form of the parents’ emotional presence in their children’s lives. Additionally, some informants also make it a habit to kiss their children before bed, accompany them during meals, take them to school when they have free time, and give their full attention when at home so that children continue to feel close to their parents. Some parents also make time to help their children with homework, prepare their favorite meals, and comfort them when they are sad or angry.

The interview results indicate that some parents still make an effort to participate in their children’s simple activities despite their busy work schedules. This involvement is evident in habits such as helping children tidy up their toys, playing with them before bed, asking about their daily activities, and offering hugs and praise as expressions of emotional care. There were also informants who mentioned that they always make an effort to listen to their child’s stories before bedtime so the child feels cared for. These simple habits demonstrate that a secure emotional bond can be built through small, consistent interactions in daily life.

Another participant explained: *“Before leaving for work, I always hug and kiss my child first so they feel calm and know that I will come back home later.”* (Informant 3) One informant explained that they always make time to read a bedtime story even when feeling tired after work. Another informant also mentioned that they always hug and kiss the child before leaving for work so the child feels calmer and continues to feel the parents’ attention. Additionally, some informants consider the habit of saying goodbye before work important to help the child understand that parents are leaving to work and will return home. These simple routines, when performed consistently, help children feel a stable emotional closeness with their parents. This finding aligns with Mary Ainsworth’s theory, which explains that a parent’s sensitivity and consistency in meeting a child’s emotional

needs form the foundation of secure attachment. Routines performed repeatedly can provide a sense of stability and safety for children, thereby allowing them to feel comforted by their parents' presence. This is supported by research stating that consistency in caregiving influences the formation of secure attachment in young children (Fadillah et al., 2021; Laksmi & Citrawati, 2022).

These daily routines help children feel safe and emotionally stable. Children become accustomed to positive interaction patterns, fostering trust and comfort toward their parents. Simple activities performed repeatedly also help children understand that their parents remain present and care for them even amidst work commitments. This demonstrates that consistency in daily interactions plays a crucial role in forming secure attachment in young children. These research findings reinforce John Bowlby's view that children need consistent and responsive caregivers to build a sense of security in their emotional relationships. Unlike traditional assumptions that working parents may struggle to establish emotional closeness with their children due to limited time, this study found that simple but consistent daily interactions can still support the development of secure attachment in early childhood. These daily routines helped children feel emotionally secure and stable. Children became familiar with positive interaction patterns, which gradually fostered trust and emotional comfort toward their parents. Repeated daily interactions also helped children understand that parents continued to care for and emotionally support them despite work-related responsibilities.

Emotional Communication Between Parents and Children

This study also found that communication is one of the key strategies working parents use to maintain emotional closeness with their children. Parents strive to create warm, open, and responsive interactions so that children continue to feel cared for even when parents are not always at home. The forms of communication vary, such as listening to the child's stories, calmly responding to the child's emotions, explaining their work to the child, and utilizing communication tools like video calls while working.

Some informants mentioned that they always make an effort to listen to their children's stories after returning from work, even when they are tired. Parents give their children the opportunity to share experiences from school or the feelings they've experienced during daily activities. Additionally, some informants explained that they choose to provide simple explanations to their children about why they work, so the children can understand their parents' circumstances and not feel neglected. Some informants also revealed that when children felt sad or angry, they preferred listening and comforting the child first before giving advice. Parents attempted to become emotionally safe spaces where children could freely express feelings and emotions.

One informant mentioned: *"When my child feels sad, I usually listen first before giving advice because I want my child to feel comfortable telling stories to me."* (Informant 4)

In addition, some informant used video calls or voice messages while working so children would continue feeling emotionally connected to their parents. Although these interactions were simple, they still contributed to children's sense of emotional closeness. The findings indicate that emotional communication allows children to feel emotionally supported and comfortable expressing their feelings to their parents. These findings are consistent with research explaining that responsive emotional communication helps children feel accepted and understood within the family environment (Fikuri & Astuti, 2021). The findings also support Bowlby's theory, which emphasizes that parents'

responsiveness to children's emotional needs is an essential component in developing secure attachment relationships.

Open and warm communication enabled children to become more comfortable sharing experiences and emotions with their parents. Parents' responses to children's emotions also influenced children's sense of safety and trust in the parent-child relationship. This study demonstrates that simple emotional expressions, such as listening to children's stories, hugging children when sad, and talking before bedtime, have substantial meaning for children's emotional development.

Indicators of Secure Attachment in Children

Based on the interview results, several signs were identified that indicate the presence of secure attachment between children and parents. Children appear comfortable being near their parents, seek out their parents when they feel sad or afraid, feel happy when their parents return home from work, and become calmer after receiving attention from their parents (Arianda et al., 2021; Septianingsih & Pranoto, 2025). Some informants also mentioned that children often hug their parents when they feel sad or want to talk. Additionally, children show enthusiasm when their parents return from work and seek their parents' attention as a form of emotional closeness (Riawan et al., 2022; Sari, 2021).

Furthermore, some informants explained that children remain calm when left alone while parents are at work because they are accustomed to receiving explanations and attention from their parents. Children understand that parents leave to work and will return home, so they do not exhibit excessive anxiety. Some informants also noted that children turn to their parents as a confidant when facing problems or feeling sad. This indicates that children trust their parents as figures capable of providing a sense of security and emotional comfort. These research findings align with the characteristics of secure attachment described by Mary Ainsworth, wherein children feel safe when near their primary attachment figure and view their parents as a source of protection and emotional comfort.

These research findings indicate that secure attachment can still form in families with working parents as long as the emotional bond between parents and children is well-established (Novera et al., 2025; Novera & Setiawati, 2023). Secure attachment is not merely influenced by the amount of time spent together, but rather by the quality of the emotional relationship built through attention, communication, daily routines, and the emotional warmth consistently provided by parents.

The findings of this study align with John Bowlby's attachment theory, which explains that secure attachment arises from the presence of a warm, responsive, and consistent caregiver who meets the child's emotional needs. Children require a figure capable of providing a sense of safety and comfort to build positive emotional bonds. This study also supports Mary Ainsworth's view that parents' sensitivity and ability to respond to a child's emotional needs have a significant influence on the formation of secure attachment.

Based on the findings, it is evident that working parents still have a significant opportunity to build a secure emotional bond with their children despite time constraints due to work (Nurlena & Wulandari, 2024). Various simple strategies, such as spending time with the child, creating positive daily routines, listening to the child's stories, and consistently providing emotional attention, have been proven to help children feel safe, comfortable, and close to their parents.

The of study findings indicate that the quality of the emotional relationship plays a more significant role than the duration of time spent together between parents and children. Children do not merely need their parents' physical presence but also require attention, emotional responsiveness, and warm communication in their daily lives. Therefore, the results of this study illustrate that secure attachment can still develop well in young children even if parents are busy with work, as long as parents are able to build positive emotional interactions and maintain them consistently. (Pinanta & Arifin, 2023; Septianingsih & Pranoto, 2025).

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that working parents are still able to foster secure attachment in young children despite limited time caused by work responsibilities. Secure attachment is developed through consistent emotional interactions, including quality time, daily routines, warm communication, and emotional responsiveness in everyday parenting practices. The findings indicate that the quality of emotional relationships plays a more important role than the amount of time spent together in helping children feel safe, valued, and emotionally connected to their parents.

This study also implies that parents and early childhood educators should support parenting practices that prioritize emotional closeness and consistent interaction with children. However, this study has several limitations, including the limited number of participants, the focus on a single research location, and the absence of standardized attachment measurement instruments. Therefore, future studies are recommended to involve broader participants from diverse backgrounds and apply more varied research approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of secure attachment in working families.

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