



IMPULSIVE BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN: PARENTING, NEUROPSYCHOLOGY,
AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION

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Abstract: *This article provides an in-depth analysis of the mental load syndrome commonly experienced by mothers living with children at home. Mental load refers not to physical effort, but to the continuous cognitive responsibility associated with organizing household tasks, childcare, and daily routines. According to reports by the APA, UNICEF, and the AAP, mental load may contribute to increased stress, cognitive fatigue, reduced attention, emotional lability, and psychosomatic symptoms among mothers (7, 8, 10). The article discusses the psychological and physiological mechanisms of mental load, its impact on family dynamics, and evidence-based strategies for alleviating it.*

Keywords: *mental load, stress, cognitive burden, maternal emotional fatigue, information overload, childcare, psychosomatic symptoms, APA, UNICEF, AAP, mindfulness.*

INTRODUCTION

The mental load syndrome observed in mothers living with children at home is becoming an increasingly relevant topic in contemporary psychology. Mental load refers not only to physical labor, but also encompasses continuous cognitive processes such as organizing family life, childcare, planning daily tasks, and anticipating potential future problems. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines mental load as a “constant cognitive responsibility” and identifies it as one of the primary sources of stress for mothers [7].

According to UNICEF reports, being constantly at home with children, managing multiple tasks simultaneously, and adhering to society’s “ideal mother” standard intensify internal anxiety, fatigue, and feelings of guilt among mothers [8]. Similarly, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) emphasizes that increased cognitive load in mothers can lead to attention difficulties, emotional fatigue, and heightened tension in interactions with children [10].

Together, these factors have a significant impact on mothers’ psycho-emotional well-being and can sometimes result in stress, burnout, difficulties in managing household tasks, and an increase in psychosomatic symptoms. The aim of this article is to explore the theoretical and practical foundations of mental load, explain how it manifests in mothers, analyze the cognitive and emotional consequences of stress, and propose evidence-based strategies for alleviation.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MENTAL LOAD

1. The Concept of Mental Load

The concept of “mental load” or “invisible work” was first scientifically defined by Daminger (2019). Mental load in household and family tasks encompasses not only physical activities but also cognitive planning, monitoring, and responsibility [1]. When mental load



is not distributed fairly within the family, mothers primarily shoulder this burden, which intensifies emotional and cognitive stress [7, 8].

2. Cognitive Load and Its Connection

Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) explains that the human brain cannot process large amounts of information simultaneously, which is why continuous cognitive load can reduce attention and decision-making capacity [3]. In mothers, mental load is closely linked with cognitive load, leading to difficulties in decision-making, decreased attention, and rapid fatigue [10].

3. Stress and Emotional Consequences

According to the model by Lazarus & Folkman (1984), stress is a psycho-emotional state associated with a perceived mismatch between demands and available resources. Data from the APA and UNICEF indicate that the continuous mental load in mothers manifests in symptoms such as rapid fatigue, irritability, feelings of guilt, and emotional lability [7, 8].

4. Social and Family Context of Mental Load

Reports by UNICEF and the AAP emphasize that uneven distribution of household tasks, lack of social support, and societal “ideal mother” standards increase mental load in mothers. This negatively affects not only the individual, but also parent-child interactions and the overall family environment [8, 10].

MAIN SOURCES OF MENTAL LOAD IN MOTHERS LIVING WITH CHILDREN AT HOME

1. Daily Household Tasks and Planning

Mothers engage in household chores, cooking, cleaning, and organizing the home. According to the APA, these activities require more continuous cognitive planning than physical effort [7]. For example, calculating children’s meals, school or daycare schedules, clothing, and study materials for each day creates a constant “mental checklist” in the mother’s mind.

2. Childcare

UNICEF reports indicate that continuously monitoring and planning for children’s health, safety, and education significantly increases mothers’ mental load [8]. For instance, if a child falls ill, the mother must coordinate work responsibilities, home tasks, and childcare simultaneously.

3. Mental Supervision and “Invisible Work”

As Daminger (2019) emphasizes, a major part of mental load is invisible work, i.e., responsibilities that are not easily seen but require continuous attention and planning [1]. These tasks include:

- Monitoring the child’s learning and educational processes
- Tracking developmental and health status
- Organizing family meetings and appointments

4. Lack of Social Support

According to APA and AAP calculations, if there is insufficient help within the family or society, mothers are forced to shoulder the mental load alone, which increases stress, fatigue, and emotional lability [7, 10].

5. Perfectionism and Social Pressure



Today, the portrayal of the “ideal mother” on Instagram and other social media platforms amplifies psychological pressure on mothers. This situation leads to constant self-evaluation, feelings of guilt, and an increase in mental load [8].

COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF MENTAL LOAD

1. Cognitive Consequences

Mental load in mothers often leads to attention difficulties, challenges in decision-making, and decreased work efficiency. According to Sweller’s (1988) Cognitive Load Theory, the brain can only process a limited amount of information at a time, and therefore continuous mental responsibility reduces decision-making capacity [3, 10].

2. Emotional Consequences

Reports from the APA, UNICEF, and AAP indicate that continuous mental load increases stress, rapid fatigue, irritability, feelings of guilt, and emotional lability in mothers [7, 8, 10]. For example, when a child is ill or household tasks accumulate, mothers often feel inadequate, which can result in emotional exhaustion and burnout.

3. Psychosomatic Symptoms

Mothers under constant stress may also experience psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, rapid heartbeat, sleep disturbances, and other stress-related physical complaints [8, 10]. According to WHO data, persistent stress negatively affects physical health as well [4].

4. Impact on Family and Child Relationships

An increased mental load also impacts mother-child interactions. According to AAP calculations, high mental load can reduce the quality of mother-child communication and increase conflicts within the family [10]. This, in turn, negatively affects not only the mother but also the child’s psychological development.

STRATEGIES TO REDUCE MENTAL LOAD

1. Cognitive Techniques

- **Task sharing and delegation:** Mothers should distribute household chores and child-related tasks equally among family members. This significantly reduces mental load [7, 8].
- **Prioritization:** Organizing tasks according to their importance and distinguishing between “immediate” and “later” tasks [1].
- **Planning and using checklists:** Writing daily tasks in a plan reduces the constant “mental monitoring” in the mother’s mind [3, 7].

2. Emotional Techniques

- **Mindfulness and breathing exercises:** Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR method reduces stress, maintains present-moment awareness, and decreases emotional fatigue [9].
- **Emotional support:** Open communication with family and friends and expressing emotions reduces stress [8, 10].

3. Family Communication

- **Fair distribution of responsibilities:** Household chores and childcare should not be solely the mother’s responsibility.
- **Open dialogue and setting expectations:** Discussing each family member’s duties openly [7, 10].



4. Organizational Strategies

- Time-blocking: Allocating specific time slots for each activity reduces mental disorganization [10].

- Meal planning and routine systems: Planning meals and household tasks in advance lowers cognitive load [8].

5. Self-care and Psychogygiene

- Allocating “me-time”: Mothers should take small breaks for mental and physical recovery [7, 8].

- Physical exercise and relaxation: Physical activity reduces stress hormones and alleviates fatigue [4].

CONCLUSION

This article systematically analyzed the mental load (invisible work) experienced by mothers living with children at home. Mental load refers primarily to continuous cognitive responsibility rather than physical labor, encompassing planning household tasks, childcare, and managing family obligations. According to reports from the APA, UNICEF, and AAP, this continuous load leads to stress, cognitive fatigue, emotional lability, and psychosomatic symptoms in mothers [7, 8, 10].

The article examined the sources of mental load, its cognitive and emotional consequences, and its impact on family and child relationships. Additionally, based on scientific research and practical resources, strategies to reduce mental load were recommended, including cognitive, emotional, communicational, and organizational approaches. Among these, task sharing, prioritization, mindfulness, open family communication, and allocating “me-time” were identified as the most effective methods.

In conclusion, managing and reducing mental load for mothers living with children at home not only supports their psychological and physical well-being but also contributes to improving the family environment and the quality of mother-child interactions.

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