

STRENGTHENING FAMILY RESILIENCE TO ENHANCE WELLBEING: A CASE STUDY IN KRIYAN BARAT RW 17, CIREBON CITY

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Abstract. Urbanization in Indonesia has significantly reshaped family dynamics, increasing psychological and social stressors, particularly in economically vulnerable communities. This study explores how families in Kriyan Barat RW 17, Cirebon City, understand and practice resilience, and how such resilience relates to their subjective wellbeing. Employing a qualitative phenomenological design, we conducted in-depth interviews with 12 participants from six families purposively categorized as resilient or non-resilient based on community assessments and indicators of coping capacity. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method, guided by Walsh's Family Resilience Framework, with a focus on belief systems, communication, and adaptive functioning. Results reveal that resilient families emphasize shared spirituality, flexible role negotiation, and emotionally open communication, which contribute to greater psychological stability. In contrast, non-resilient families struggle with rigid roles, emotional suppression, and poor communication. By focusing on urban families in Cirebon, this research enriches the global discourse on family resilience with culturally grounded insights from Southeast Asia, a context that remains limited in current resilience literature. These findings offer practical implications for designing context-sensitive interventions to strengthen family well-being in urban Indonesian settings.

Keywords: family resilience, urban Indonesia, subjective wellbeing, phenomenology, Walsh framework, urban stress

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization has redefined family life across Indonesia, with profound implications for psychological wellbeing and social functioning. As urban populations have surged, now encompassing over 57% of the national demographic (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023), so too have challenges related to housing constraints, job insecurity, and the weakening of traditional social networks. These pressures are particularly visible in mid-sized urban centers, such as Cirebon, West Java, where the pace of urban growth often outstrips the development of social support infrastructure. In recent years, local data has revealed sharp increases in domestic instability, including a rise in divorce rates exceeding 11% between 2021 and 2023 (Pengadilan Agama Cirebon, 2023), alongside mounting reports of adolescent behavioral issues, emotional burnout among caregivers, and family conflict in high-density neighborhoods.

These structural and relational stressors are not evenly distributed and are most acutely felt in communities marked by economic precarity and limited access to formal services. Kriyan Barat RW 17, a densely populated neighborhood in the Lemahwungkuk district of Cirebon, reflects many of these vulnerabilities. Field observations conducted prior to data collection revealed that households were grappling with intersecting challenges: intergenerational cohabitation in cramped living quarters, single-parent caregiving amid chronic unemployment, and patterns of emotional

disengagement among family members. These conditions not only strain family functioning but also erode opportunities for emotional regulation, support, and shared meaning-making, critical components of resilience in the face of adversity.

Amid such complexity, some families appear to adapt more effectively than others. Early interactions and conversations with residents revealed striking contrasts. In several homes, caregivers described daily rituals of shared meals, prayer, and open discussion as stabilizing forces, despite material hardship. Others conveyed a sense of fatigue, isolation, or resignation. One mother explained, “We believe every hardship is a lesson, and we pray together every morning to find strength,” while another participant shared, “There is no more energy to talk; we just try to get through the day.” These divergent narratives suggest that resilience is neither a uniform trait nor a simple outcome, but a lived process shaped by internal beliefs, relational patterns, and contextual constraints.

The existing literature emphasizes the importance of family resilience as a protective mechanism during times of stress. It has been associated with improved psychological outcomes, enhanced adaptive functioning, and strengthened relational bonds (Walsh, 2016; Ungar, 2021; Saltzman et al., 2020). However, much of this scholarship has relied on quantitative assessments and standardized frameworks developed in Western settings. Such approaches often privilege individualistic models of coping and may fail to capture how resilience is constructed and expressed within collectivist, faith-centered, and relationally interdependent cultures, such as those found in Indonesia. Moreover, while research on family resilience in the context of natural disasters and rural adversity has expanded in recent years, less attention has been directed toward families managing prolonged psychosocial stress in urban, non-crisis contexts.

To engage with this dimension of family experience, the present study adopts a qualitative phenomenological design to explore how families in Kriyan Barat RW 17 interpret, enact, and sustain resilience in their everyday lives. Rather than starting from fixed assumptions about what resilience is, the research seeks to uncover how participants themselves articulate the meaning of hardship, emotional recovery, and familial solidarity. By foregrounding participants’ voices, values, and narratives, the study aims to surface dimensions of resilience that are often obscured in variable-based analyses—such as spiritual reframing, cultural roles, and adaptive relational practices.

The study is guided by the Family Resilience Framework (Walsh, 2016), which conceptualizes resilience as a systemic, process-oriented construct shaped by three core domains: belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication/problem-solving. These domains are operationalized not as abstract constructs but as lived phenomena reflected in the language, decisions, rituals, and conflicts encountered in the daily rhythms of family life. This orientation enables the research to trace how families internalize and respond to adversity, how they renegotiate roles, and how they maintain or fail to maintain emotional connection under prolonged stress.

Through in-depth semi-structured interviews with twelve adult participants from six families, the study uncovers a spectrum of resilient and non-resilient responses that reflect not only individual coping capacities but broader social and cultural ecologies. Participants from families identified as resilient described shared spiritual beliefs, mutual caregiving, and regular dialogue practices that fostered a sense of meaning and cohesion. In contrast, members of less resilient families reported difficulty expressing emotions, rigid role expectations, and withdrawal from community ties. These insights suggest that resilience, in this context, is deeply relational and culturally embedded, emerging not from abstract psychological traits but from negotiated daily practices within resource-constrained environments.

This research contributes to an expanded understanding of resilience in Southeast Asian urban contexts, offering insight into the ways families build internal strength amid external instability. By focusing on a culturally grounded, experientially rich analysis, it broadens the theoretical landscape of family resilience and informs the development of interventions that are both psychologically attuned and socially relevant. In a policy environment increasingly focused on mental health and family welfare in urban Indonesia, the findings directly address the need for community-based, relationally informed strategies that acknowledge the lived realities of families facing ongoing adversity.

METHODS

As outlined in the abstract, this study aimed to explore how urban families in Cirebon experience and interpret family resilience in the face of socioeconomic adversity, particularly in relation to their subjective wellbeing. To achieve this, a qualitative phenomenological approach was employed, allowing for a rich, in-depth investigation into the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of families navigating hardship (van Manen, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was conducted over a three-month period, from January to March 2025.

Study Context and Design

The study was situated in RW 17, Kriyan Barat, a high-density subdistrict in Cirebon City characterized by limited infrastructure, economic precarity, and increasing family stress indicators. This setting was deliberately chosen to examine family resilience within a culturally rich yet socioeconomically vulnerable urban environment, an area that is underrepresented in the global resilience literature.

Using an interpretive phenomenological paradigm, the study focused on the subjective experiences and internal frameworks through which families construct and sustain resilience. The theoretical framework guiding the study was Walsh's Family Resilience Framework (2016), emphasizing belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication/problem-solving as core domains.

Participants and Sampling Strategy

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that families had relevant experience and insight into resilience under stress. Inclusion criteria were as follows:

- a. Residing in RW 17, Kriyan Barat, for at least five years.
- b. Having experienced at least one significant family stressor in the past three years, such as financial hardship, serious illness, divorce, or job loss.
- c. Having adult members (aged 30–55) willing to share personal and family narratives.

The final sample consisted of 12 adult participants from six families, with an equal distribution of resilient ($n = 3$) and non-resilient ($n = 3$) family groups. Preliminary classification was based on a brief community-based assessment using the Family Resilience Questionnaire (FRQ), adapted from Walsh (2016), and validated in consultation with community leaders and local social workers. This stratification allowed for maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2015), capturing diverse responses to adversity.

The sample included both dual-parent and single-parent households, with the majority consisting of married couples (father and mother), and a minority of families led by a single mother or father due to separation or widowhood. This diversity in family structure allowed for a richer understanding of how different family types construct resilience.

Table1. Categorization Based on Family Resilience Indicators

Family Code	Resilience Category	Household Members	Observed Resilience Indicators	Resilient Statement	Non-Resilient Statement
Family A	Resilient	2 (Father & Mother)	- Shared spiritual belief - Flexible role distribution - Open communication - Collaborative problem-solving	“We face every challenge together and always try to find a way out as a family.”	“Every problem feels overwhelming. We often don’t know what to do.”
Family B	Resilient	2 (Mother & 1 Child)	- Daily check-ins - Emotional expression - Shared responsibilities - Positive outlook	“We always sit together every night and talk about how the day went.”	“We avoid talking about problems because it makes things worse.”
Family C	Resilient	2 (Father, 1 Child)	- Supportive communication - Spiritual coping - Engagement with neighbors - Adaptive roles	“When I’m unwell, my children help with chores and sometimes with earning income.”	“We rarely talk when problems happen. It’s better to stay quiet.”
Family D	Non-Resilient	2 (Father, Mother, 1 Children)	- Rigid gender roles - Emotional withdrawal - Avoidance of conflict	“We often keep problems to ourselves and try not to bring them up.”	“We stay silent when someone is angry. Talking only makes it worse.”
Family E	Non-Resilient	2 (Mother & 1 Child)	- Minimal communication - Role rigidity - Low emotional coping	“I often feel stuck and uncertain about how to move forward.”	“I usually feel anxious facing problems and try to ignore them.”
Family F	Non-Resilient	2 (Father & Mother)	- Poor emotional regulation - Disengaged problem-solving	“We don’t really talk about our feelings openly.”	“We both feel overwhelmed but don’t know how to support each other.”

Family Resilience Code	Household Members	Observed Resilience Indicators	Resilient Statement	Non-Resilient Statement
		- Weak spiritual anchoring		

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in the Indonesian language, Bahasa Indonesia. Interview sessions lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, and were held in participants' homes or nearby community spaces to ensure comfort and openness. The interview protocol was designed based on Walsh's resilience framework and covered:

- Spiritual and belief systems
- Role flexibility and family organization
- Communication, emotional expression, and problem-solving approaches

All interviews were audio recorded with participant consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized using pseudonyms. In addition to transcripts, field notes were maintained to record non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase procedure. Transcripts were coded using NVivo 12 software, enabling the systematic organization and retrieval of themes. Additionally, Colaizzi's method (1978) was applied to strengthen phenomenological depth: significant statements were extracted, formulated into meanings, and clustered into thematic categories. To ensure rigor and credibility, the following strategies were implemented:

- Data triangulation: combining transcripts, field notes, and contextual data.
- Member checking: participants were given summaries to confirm interpretation accuracy.
- Peer debriefing: interpretations were discussed with qualitative research peers to reduce bias.
- Audit trail: comprehensive documentation was maintained throughout the research process.

These measures adhered to the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research (Nowell et al., 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the lived experiences of family resilience among urban households in Kriyan Barat RW 17, Cirebon City, using a phenomenological approach grounded in Walsh's Family Resilience Framework (2016). The findings revealed three major domains that distinguish resilient families from non-resilient ones: shared belief systems, flexible family organization, and emotionally open communication. These insights contribute to an emerging body of research on the contextual and relational construction of resilience in under-researched Southeast Asian urban environments.

1. Shared Belief Systems: Meaning-Making Amid Adversity

Resilient families consistently framed adversity through shared spiritual narratives, perceiving hardship as a test from a divine perspective or an opportunity for moral growth. This belief system not only functioned as an internal coping strategy but also served as a unifying family

value that fostered emotional regulation and coherence. For instance, daily collective prayers and gratitude practices were reported as sources of emotional strength and unity.

These findings reinforce Walsh's (2016) proposition that belief systems are central to resilience, offering interpretive structures that guide emotional responses to crisis. They also echo empirical research by Nurhayati and Sari (2021), who found that in Indonesian families, spirituality functions as both an emotional buffer and a communal anchor during chronic stress. In contrast, non-resilient families exhibited fragmented or absent belief structures, with several participants expressing existential fatigue and disengagement from spiritual or cultural traditions, conditions that often coincided with emotional withdrawal.

2. Organizational Flexibility: Adaptive Role Distribution

Resilient families demonstrated flexible and pragmatic role-sharing, often across gender and generational lines. Adolescents contributed to caregiving and financial responsibilities when needed, and decision-making was typically collaborative. These families viewed role adaptability not merely as a necessity but as an ethical commitment to mutual support.

Such adaptive functioning aligns with the work of Saltzman et al. (2020) and Masten (2018), who argue that flexibility in family roles enhances the capacity to withstand external pressures and maintain relational stability. Notably, in the socio-cultural context of Cirebon, such flexibility is interpreted through moral idioms (e.g., "gotong royong" or mutual help), suggesting that resilience is sustained through culturally rooted expectations of shared responsibility. Non-resilient families, however, tended to exhibit rigid hierarchies, often reinforcing traditional roles even in the face of dysfunction. This rigidity impeded their ability to redistribute stress and fostered emotional overload, particularly for single caregivers.

3. Emotional Communication: Regulation and Connectedness

Another key differentiator was communication style. Resilient families practiced open, emotionally attuned dialogue. Members described regular check-ins, mutual emotional validation, and the willingness to discuss difficult issues. These practices supported emotional regulation and built relational trust, an essential buffer against cumulative stress. Conversely, non-resilient families exhibited patterns of avoidance, suppression, or escalation. Conflicts were left unresolved, and emotional needs were often overlooked. This aligns with the work of Hadi and Rahmawati (2020), who emphasize that ineffective communication in Indonesian families correlates with increased relational distress and lower resilience. The evidence supports Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), which situates microsystemic interactions, such as familial communication, as crucial pathways for managing external socioeconomic stressors.

4. Theoretical Implications and Novel Contributions

The study's findings provide strong empirical support for Walsh's Family Resilience Framework (2016) in an urban Indonesian setting, reinforcing its cross-cultural validity. Furthermore, by employing a phenomenological methodology, the research uncovers emic (insider) perspectives on how resilience is constructed, sustained, and interpreted, insights that are often absent in quantitative or Western-centric resilience models (Ungar, 2021).

Critically, this study offers an indigenous expansion of the resilience discourse by documenting how spirituality, relational duty, and collective adaptability serve as core mechanisms of resilience in non-Western, resource-constrained urban contexts. Unlike models that emphasize individual autonomy, this research highlights relational interdependence as a culturally congruent pathway to resilience, making a valuable theoretical contribution to global psychology and cross-cultural counseling studies.

5. Practical and Societal Relevance

The findings have direct implications for policy and practice. Interventions aimed at strengthening urban family resilience should:

- a. Integrate spiritual and cultural narratives into family counseling models;
- b. Promote role flexibility and shared responsibilities in family education programs;
- c. Develop community-based platforms to foster emotional expression and conflict resolution.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that family resilience in urban Indonesian contexts, specifically within Kriyan Barat RW 17, Cirebon City, is shaped by culturally rooted belief systems, adaptive organizational patterns, and emotionally responsive communication. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach guided by Walsh's Family Resilience Framework, the research revealed that resilient families are characterized by shared spirituality, role flexibility, and open emotional dialogue, which collectively contribute to psychological stability and adaptive functioning amidst chronic socioeconomic stress. In contrast, families lacking these features exhibited relational rigidity, emotional disengagement, and communication breakdown, which undermined their capacity to cope effectively with adversity. These findings not only confirm the applicability of systemic resilience theory in non-Western urban settings but also enrich it by illustrating the culturally specific expressions of resilience in collectivist societies. The study's insights are theoretically significant in expanding the understanding of resilience as a dynamic and relational process, and practically relevant for informing the design of culturally sensitive family-based interventions and public policies aimed at strengthening family wellbeing in low-resource, high-density urban environments.

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