

Analysis of Management Strategies and Religious Beliefs of Families with Five or More Children

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia in the contemporary demographic landscape is increasingly dominated by the norm of small nuclear families, while large families with more than five children are often seen as marginalized and burdened with social stigma. The narrative of state policies through Family Planning programs and modern economic discourse places the extended family as an "illegal" entity, associated with economic burdens, domestic turmoil, and parental attention deficits. This article dismantles these assumptions through a qualitative case study of a family of five children in a semi-urban environment. This study delves into the often over looked micro-sociological dynamics in macrostatistics, using in-depth interviews and participatory observations. The thematic analysis identified three main pillars of extended family resilience: (1) a stratified yet adaptive domestic management system, with a gender- and age-based division of labor for efficiency; (2) internalization of the value of responsibility through disciplinary repetition and collective supervision; and (3) the construction of religious beliefs "many children have plenty of sustenance" which functions as psychological capital and transcendent coping strategies in the face of economic uncertainty and social pressure. These findings challenge deficit narratives about the extended family and show how Islamic spirituality and traditional management combine to create solid subjective well-being.

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1. Introduction

The transformation of Indonesian society's social structure over the past five decades has been marked by a fundamental demographic shift, moving from the extended family and large family model toward the dominance of the smaller nuclear family (Qibthiyyah and Utomo 2016). This shift did not occur in a vacuum, but rather resulted from systematic structural interventions through the Family Planning (KB) program launched during the New Order era, as well as global economic pressures demanding mobility and efficiency in family

units. The "Two Children Are Enough" narrative has become deeply internalized in society's collective consciousness, shaping new normative standards for what constitutes a "successful," "responsible," and "modern" family (Rahmadhohy et al. 2021). Within this paradigm, families with large numbers of children are often viewed as an anomaly, a deviation from the norms of economic rationality that is perceived as burdensome to both family and state resources.

The stigma attached to extended families is often multidimensional. Economically, they are assumed to be in a precarious condition, struggling to meet basic needs with inadequately distributed resources (dilution of resources hypothesis). Psychologically, parents in extended families are often accused of being unable to provide optimal affective and cognitive attention to each child, which is feared to impact the low quality of human resources produced (Blake 1981). Socially, they are often the object of scrutiny or critical scrutiny from their surroundings, considered to have failed in future planning, or even labeled as an "uneducated" group. However, amidst the hegemony of the small family discourse, the extended family phenomenon continues to exist and demonstrates its vitality, especially among Indonesian Muslims who uphold traditional religious values.

For this segment of society, the decision to have many children is not the result of ignorance about contraception or a failure to plan, but rather a conscious manifestation of a different theological value system. The doctrine of "Many Children, Many Provisions," rooted in the belief in divine provision, is the antithesis of Malthusian logic, which views population growth as a threat to resource availability. In this view, each child is seen not as a cost but as a blessing and a spiritual asset. (Heru and Miftakhussurur 2025)

Problems arise when this theological reality collides with the sociological and economic realities on the ground. How exactly can a family with limited resources manage the logistical, emotional, and financial complexities of five growing individuals? The existing academic literature tends to be polarized. On the one hand, macrodemographic studies often portray large families only as fertility statistics that need to be controlled. On the other hand, normative religious studies often stop at the proposition of encouraging more children without addressing the practical aspects of daily management. There is a significant knowledge gap regarding the "black box" of internal dynamics of large families: how they organize bathroom queues, divide food portions, manage sibling conflict, and even manage education costs amidst limitations.

This study aims to fill this gap by offering an in-depth microsociological analysis. The urgency of this research lies in its attempt to reconstruct our understanding of the multifaceted concept of "family well-being." If the parameters of modern family well-being are measured by material accumulation and individual privacy, the extended family may offer an alternative model of well-being based on social cohesion, collective resilience, and spiritual fulfillment. Ahmad (2018) in his study of the sociology of Muslim families noted that mechanical solidarity within the extended family often serves as a more effective social safety net than formal insurance, yet the mechanisms of its formation are rarely documented in detail (Sainul 2018).

However, several fundamental issues remain unanswered by previous research. Most studies on family resilience still focus on families facing external crises (natural disasters, divorce, death), and do not explore families facing "chronic stress" due to the choice of family structure itself. Furthermore, not many have specifically examined the operational management strategies—the daily tactics—used by housewives as primary managers in navigating domestic chaos into productive order.

Therefore, this article aims to answer the research questions: How do large families with five or more children implement daily life management strategies to achieve balanced family functions, and how are religious beliefs constructed into resilience mechanisms in the face of social stigma? Specifically, the objectives of this article are: (1) Identifying and mapping domestic management systems, including role division and resource management; (2) Analyzing the role of religious doctrine in the formation of responsible character and perceptions of justice; and (3) Describing the social psychological defense strategies developed by families in response to external criticism. Thus, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of local culture-based resilience concepts and practical contributions to Islamic family counseling.

2. Literature Review

Family Resilience Framework

The concept of family resilience has evolved beyond the simple definition of "survival." Walsh (2006) defines family resilience as a family's capacity to rebound from adversity, emerging stronger and more resourceful than before. Unlike pathological approaches that look for "what's wrong" or deficits within the family, the resilience approach focuses on strengths -based and the family's potential for self - repair. Herdiana (2018) in her literature review emphasized that family resilience is not a static characteristic that a family either "has" or "doesn't," but rather a dynamic process involving interactions between family members and their environment. In the context of extended families, this resilience becomes crucial because they face dual pressures: internal pressures from competition for resources among family members, and external pressures from societal stigma. (Herdiana 2018)

The three main domains of family functioning in Walsh's resilience framework that are relevant to this study are (Herdiana 2018; Sa'diyah, CH, and Hakim 2025):

- a. Family Belief Systems : This is the heart of resilience. How does a family view their crises or challenges? Is it as punishment, bad luck, or a meaningful test? In religious families, transcendent beliefs give meaning to economic hardship as a means of spiritual growth. The belief that "children bring good fortune" is a radically positive outlook in the face of future uncertainty.
- b. Organizational Patterns : Resilience requires structural flexibility, connectedness, and socioeconomic resources. Extended families require more complex organizational structures than small families. They must balance stability (clear rules) with flexibility (the ability to adapt to illness or sudden needs).

c. Communication Processes : Clarity of information, open emotional expression, and collaborative problem-solving. In extended families, communication patterns are often networked, where messages flow through intermediaries (e.g., older siblings) to maintain efficiency.

The Concept of Family Jurisprudence (Muamalah) and the Theology of Sustenance

From an Islamic perspective, the family is not only viewed as a sociological unit, but as a Rabbani institution. Family jurisprudence (Fiqh Munakahat and Muamalah) places children's education (tarbiyah) as a trust (amanah) from Allah SWT that must be safeguarded. Parents' responsibilities (mas'uliyyah al-walidayn) include aspects of nafaqah (fulfillment of physical/material needs), tarbiyah (intellectual education), and ta'dib (cultivation of manners/morals). (Heru and Miftakhussurur 2025; Pasaribu and Islamiyah 2025).

The concept of "Many Children, Much Provisions," which is the central theme of this study, has strong theological justification in the Qur'an and Hadith. The Qur'an, Surah Hud, verse 6, explicitly states: "And there is no creature on earth but that upon Allah is its sustenance." This verse establishes the paradigm of Tawhid Rububiyyah, which eliminates the fear of poverty due to the number of dependents. In addition, the narrative of the Prophet's hadith, which recommends marrying a woman who is al-wadud (compassionate) and al-walud (fertile) because he will be proud of the number of his followers in the afterlife, provides eschatological motivation for Muslim couples to have large families (Heru and Miftakhussurur 2025).

However, Islam also teaches the concepts of Qawwam (leadership/responsibility) and Kafa'ah (equivalence/capability). This is often a point of contention: on the one hand, there is the encouragement to multiply children, while on the other, there is the obligation to ensure their welfare (hifz al-nasl) (Situbondo 2025). This study will examine how the subject families reconcile this tension between quantity and quality through their daily Muamalah strategies.

3. Research Methodology

This section describes the research design, subject characteristics, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques used to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

This research design uses a qualitative approach with a case study. This approach is based on Safrudin et al.'s (2023) argument that qualitative research is highly relevant for exploring phenomena that are processual, meaningful, and bound by a strong cultural context. Case studies allow researchers to conduct thick descriptions of family life dynamics that cannot be captured through quantitative surveys. The focus of the research is not on statistical generalizations, but rather on the transferability of meaning and depth of understanding (verstehen) of extended family life strategies. (Safarudin et al. 2023; Andriani et al. 2025)

Characteristics of Research Subjects were selected using purposive sampling techniques with strict inclusion criteria to ensure data richness:

- a. Number of Children: A nuclear family with a minimum of five biological children who are still alive and living under one roof or are dependents.
- b. Age Variation: Children have a varied age range, from adolescence/young adulthood to childhood/toddlerhood. This variation is important for understanding the dynamics of intergenerational parenting and task delegation.
- c. Socio-Economic Context: Living in a semi-urban environment (on the border between a city and a village) that has access to public facilities but still maintains communal values. This context is relevant for examining the interaction between modernity and tradition.
- d. Religious Background: Families who identify as devout Muslims and are active in community religious activities.

The selected subject family consisted of a father (an informal sector worker), a mother (a full-time housewife), and five children (four school-age/college-age children and one infant). This family represents a typical lower-middle-class family struggling on the outskirts of the metropolis, facing the pressures of high living costs while maintaining an extended family structure.

Data Collection Process Data was collected through in-depth interview techniques and naturalistic observation. Interviews were conducted primarily with mothers as the household operational managers (the "gatekeepers" of domestic information) (Safarudin et al. 2023). The interview guide was semi-structured, including 15 key questions that developed flexibly. Question topics included: (1) Daily routines and division of tasks; (2) Financial management strategies and prioritization of needs; (3) Parenting patterns and instilling religious values; (4) Interactions between siblings; and (5) Responses to social criticism or environmental stigma. Interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder with the informant's informed consent.

Researchers conducted direct observations of the physical condition of the house, non-verbal interactions between family members during the interview, and the atmosphere of the environment around the house to validate the interview data.

Data Analysis Techniques Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach as suggested by Braun and Clarke, adapted to the context of Islamic education research (Braun and Clarke 2022). The analysis steps include:

- a. Data Transcription: Converting audio recordings into verbatim text to capture every nuance of language and emotion.
- b. Coding: Conducting open coding on the transcripts to identify relevant units of meaning, such as "saving strategies," "sharing of washing tasks," "belief in sustenance," or "neighbors' gossip."
- c. Categorization and Themes: Grouping related codes into categories, then arranging them into main themes that answer the problem formulation. The theoretical framework

of family resilience (Herdiana 2018) was used as an analytical tool to interpret the emerging themes.

d. Validation: Using source triangulation (comparing statements with theory) and member checking (confirming the researcher's understanding back to the subject if necessary) to ensure the validity of the data.

4. Research Results and Discussion

A thorough analysis of field data revealed that the success of the subject families in maintaining balance and happiness rests on the dynamic interaction of three key elements: a practical management system, internalized character values, and a foundation of spiritual belief. The following is a detailed discussion of these three elements.

A. Daily Family Management System

The first finding challenges the stereotype that large families are synonymous with disorganization. Instead, these families exhibit a high level of organization, similar to the operational management of a small organization. This order is not achieved through rigid bureaucratic rules, but rather through the formation of an organic family "work culture."

Age and Gender Graded Division of Labor

The data shows a clear stratification of roles. The mother acts as Chief Operating Officer (COO) with central control, but technical implementation is distributed hierarchically.

Table 1. Matrix of Domestic Role Division in Subject's Family

Role	Main Responsibilities	Function Analysis
Mother	Cooking, Financial Management, Babysitting	<i>Nutritional and economic gatekeepers.</i> Ensuring basic nutritional and survival standards.
Eldest Child (Female)	Washing clothes, ironing (<i>laundry</i>), helping younger siblings study	<i>Instrumental-expressive</i> role. As a "representative mother", she learns domestic and managerial skills.
Boy	Rough physical work (cleaning the yard, lifting gallons), congregational prayers at the mosque	<i>Instrumental-physical</i> roles. Socialization of traditional gender roles and public/religious responsibilities.
Middle School Children	Babysitting/looking after baby brother, tidying up toys	<i>Chain of care.</i> Learning empathy and responsible parenting from an early age.

Mother stated: "The older ones mostly do the washing and ironing. As for cooking, it's me." This statement emphasizes that despite delegation, there are core tasks (such as cooking) that remain with the mother as a symbol of affection and quality control. This division of tasks is not just about efficiency, but also a process of life skills education. Children in large families do not have the luxury of being passive; they are active contributors to the household's survival (Situbondo 2025). However, research also warns of the risk of

"parentification" if the delegation of tasks is too heavy, interfering with children's right to play (Ardani and Sadewo 2025).

Financial Management: Priority Strategy and Utilization of Safety Nets

In the economic aspect, the family implements permanent, adaptive crisis management. The term "deficit" is avoided by strictly emphasizing the separation between needs and wants. Mother explains her philosophy: "Well, urgent needs, right? So, urgent needs come first. Priorities, right, can be dealt with later." Analysis of this statement reveals an effective "fire-fighting" strategy.

Limited resources are allocated in a just-in-time manner for crucial needs (food, electricity, healthcare). Furthermore, families intelligently utilize public facilities. The use of "free schools" is a rational strategy to mitigate education costs, which are typically the largest component of expenditure. This demonstrates that extended families possess good system literacy the ability to navigate and utilize state subsidies for their own survival. (Isnani et al. 2025).

Justice and Compassion: Pragmatic Egalitarianism

How do they share their love among their five children? This family applies a concept of justice based on equal access to basic materials and inclusive activities. "This child eats this, yes, the same, like that. There's no discrimination," said the mother. A shared menu is the strongest symbol of family solidarity. There are no glaring individual privileges (Sainul 2018). When it comes to recreation or mobility, the principle is "all or nothing." "We go, yes, we all go, like that."

These shared activities, although simple (such as watching cartoons together after Maghrib), serve as bonding rituals that reduce sibling rivalry (Rahmasari et al. 2025). Flexible time spent together ("If there's time, that's it... It doesn't have to be Saturday-Sunday") demonstrates the family's adaptability to the father's informal working life rhythm, not tied to a rigid corporate holiday schedule.

B. Religious Education and Internalization of Responsibility: Building Spiritual Resilience

Education in this family does not rely solely on verbal instructions, but rather on environmental conditioning and repetition.

Repetition and Surveillance Method

Instilling responsibility in five children with different personalities requires extraordinary perseverance. Mother acknowledged this challenge: "At most, I just remind them, 'What are you doing?' I tell them every day, but they still repeat it." In character education theory, what Mother is doing is called habituation (Hidayati, Hidayat, and Purnawati 2025).

This "boring" repetition of instructions is actually a process of internalizing values. Supervision or surveillance is not only carried out by parents, but also through peer-monitoring mechanisms between siblings. Older siblings reprimand younger siblings, and

younger siblings remind older siblings. The extended family structure creates a "small society" where norms are enforced collectively.

Religious Rituals as an Anchor of Life

Religious activities form the backbone of family routines. Active participation in neighborhood religious studies (religious study groups) from Maghrib to Isha is a mandatory agenda. "...attending community religious studies (after Maghrib until Isha). All ages participate: from kindergarten to high school, parents, and even babies." This phenomenon is interesting to analyze from two perspectives:

Educational Function: Religious study groups replace private tutoring or courses that may be unaffordable. Children receive moral and social education from the community. (Muhammad Sohibuddin 2025)

Social Cohesion Function: This activity integrates families into the community's social safety net. By being known as a family that regularly attends the mosque, they gain social capital and acceptance that may reduce negative stigma (Pasaribu and Islamiyah 2025). Congregational prayer for fathers and sons in the prayer room also serves as a transmission of Islamic masculinity, where being a man means being a worship leader.

C. Religious Beliefs and Responses to Stigma

The most significant finding of this research is how religious doctrines are converted into powerful self-defense mechanisms.

The Theology of "Many Children, Much Blessing" as Capital for Resilience

Mother expressed her fundamental belief: "Every child is born with their own blessings, right? There's always something. When we need something, there's always a blessing." This statement isn't just passive fatalism. In positive psychology, it's called faith-based dispositional optimism. This belief shifts the perception of children from "burdens" (liabilities) to "gates to fortune" (assets).

Theoretically, this aligns with the concept of Barakah in Islamic economics, a growth and blessing that is not always linear with mathematical calculations. This belief reduces parental stress (anxiety reduction). While modern economic logic says, "It's impossible to support five children," the logic of faith says, "God will guarantee it." This psychological calm is an invaluable asset that allows parents to remain sane and function optimally under pressure. (Heru and Miftakhussurur 2025)

Resistance Strategy to Social Criticism

Extended families are often the target of cynical comments ("not following family planning," "children are neglected"). The subject family's response to this is very firm and defensive. "Don't worry about the neighbors. The neighbors don't feed them. They just comment. Don't pay any attention." This attitude of "ignorance" or indifference is a conscious coping strategy. The family builds a clear boundary (boundary making) between "Us" (the family) and "Them" (the critics).

The "Our Business, Our Business" philosophy reflects a strong internal locus of control. Families reject the definition of success imposed by society. They create their own: healthy, pious children who gather together. External criticism actually strengthens in-group solidarity, as the family feels they have a "common enemy" or a common challenge that must be met with evidence of success. This resistance protects the family's self-esteem from erosion due to social stigma (Putri, Rahmawati, and Syafitri 2023).

5. Conclusion

The results of this study challenge the common narrative that views extended families as vulnerable and troubled entities. Instead, it found that resource constraints fueled management innovation and strengthened spiritual bonds. The subject families did not "suffer" in their busy lives; they found joy in intense interactions and a belief in the transcendent purpose of parenting. Their resilience arose not in spite of having many children, but because of them—the children were complementary sources of motivation, domestic labor, and comfort.

As a recommendation, extended families are expected to maintain a pattern of deliberation and financial openness to older children without triggering psychological burdens, and ensure that the delegation of tasks does not lead to "parentification" that takes away children's rights to play and learn. For society and educational practitioners, an inclusive and non-judgmental attitude is needed through concrete support from schools and the use of a strengths-based approach by family counselors who explore religious values as a source of resilience. Longitudinal studies are also urgently needed to map the long-term impact of extended family parenting patterns on children's career success and mental well-being as they step into adulthood.

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