



Social Resilience and Adaptive Strategies of Female-Headed Households in Indonesia: A Strength-Based Social Work Perspective with ASEAN Implications

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Abstract

Female-headed households (FHHs), locally known as Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (PEKKA), face intersecting challenges in managing productive and reproductive roles within a patriarchal social context. Despite limited access to economic resources and social support, many demonstrate strong adaptive capacities that sustain household livelihoods. This study examines the adaptive strategies of FHHs in Garut, Indonesia, and their contribution to socio-economic resilience from a strength-based social work perspective. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected from five key informants and seventeen PEKKA participants through interviews, observation, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke revealed that FHHs build resilience through role prioritization, kinship networks, livelihood diversification, and community engagement — strategies that parallel resilience patterns documented among female-headed households in Malaysia and Vietnam. Social resilience emerges primarily from internal strengths and collective solidarity, suggesting that community-based empowerment models developed in Indonesia hold transferable value for social work policy and practice across the ASEAN region.

Keywords: Female-headed households; Social resilience; Adaptive strategies; Social work, indonesia

Introduction

Female-headed households (FHHs), locally referred to as Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (PEKKA), represent a growing social phenomenon across many countries, including Indonesia and several ASEAN member states where similar demographic and gender inequality trends are increasingly documented (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). Changes in family structures, global economic dynamics, and labor migration have increasingly led women to assume the role of household heads and primary economic providers (Zhang et al., 2024). According to Statistics Indonesia (2023), approximately 12.73% of households in Indonesia are headed by women (Isnur, 2024), with an upward trend over the past three years. This indicates that one or two out of every ten women in Indonesia serve as household heads.

This condition is largely driven by spousal death, divorce, migration of husbands, or economic pressures that compel women to take on primary family responsibilities (Vimefall & Levin, 2023). However, the rising number of female-headed households has not been matched by adequate

structural support in terms of policy, economic resources, or social assistance. Many women face limited access to productive resources, business capital, education, training, and social protection (Mgalamadzi et al., 2024; Trias-Prats & Esteve, 2024).

Despite the increase in FHHs, their overall well-being does not necessarily improve. Most female household heads work in the informal sector with irregular income, minimal social protection, and restricted access to productive resources (Rains, 2025). This reflects the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty, in which women are structurally more vulnerable to poverty due to gender inequalities and patriarchal social systems (Boadi et al., 2025; Li & He, 2024).

Within the Indonesian socio-cultural context, female household heads frequently encounter stigma and marginalization. Their status as heads of households is often perceived as “unconventional” and associated with domestic failure, such as divorce or spousal death (Kurnia et al., 2024). Such social stigma impacts not only women’s self-esteem but also their access to social and economic support. Nevertheless, many female-headed households demonstrate remarkable resilience, illustrating that vulnerability does not necessarily equate to weakness. Through their lived experiences, these women develop empowerment and social resilience.

Theoretically, women’s empowerment is understood as a social transformation process through which individuals gain the capacity to make strategic life choices previously denied to them (Kabeer, 1999). This process depends not only on material resources but also on self-awareness, social solidarity, and collective capacity for change. This framework is highly relevant for understanding the struggles of FHHs in Indonesia, who often utilize social networks and spiritual values as social capital in building household resilience (Herdiyanti, 2024).

Rowlands further emphasizes this perspective by conceptualizing women’s power along three dimensions: power within (inner strength), power with (collective strength), and power to (capacity to act) (Rowlands, 1997). These forms of power underpin the emergence of social resilience, defined as the ability of individuals or groups to adapt, endure, and recover from social and economic stressors (Rui et al., 2025).

In the local Indonesian context, female-headed households face complex social realities. On one hand, they are expected to fulfill economic (productive) and caregiving (reproductive) roles. On the other hand, they must navigate cultural norms that marginalize women. Yet, many FHHs successfully develop adaptive strategies rooted in group solidarity and spiritual values. This is particularly evident in FHHs groups, which have emerged across various regions, including Garut Regency.

Garut presents a distinctive social context. As a rural area with a strong religious culture, female household heads in Garut confront unique social challenges, such as limited employment opportunities and patriarchal pressures (Purba et al., 2025). The local “Domba Garut” philosophy, embraced by FHHs, symbolizes courage, perseverance, and resilience, reflecting social, economic, and cultural significance in West Java society (Rosydiani & Ainun, n.d.).

Despite these constraints, FHHs groups in Garut play a significant role in strengthening social solidarity, fostering productive economic activities, and enhancing members’ self-confidence. From a social work perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates how women’s empowerment can be integral to community-based social development (Suryani et al., 2023). Social workers hold a strategic role in facilitating empowerment through a strength-based approach, a paradigm that positions individuals not as intervention objects but as agents of change with capacity and potential (Saleebey, 2013).

This study argues that FHH resilience is shaped by both external factors (policies, social assistance) and internal strengths (grassroots networks, community solidarity). Therefore, the study aims to analyze the adaptive strategies employed by female-headed households in managing productive and reproductive roles, the forms of power generated to support their socio-economic resilience, and the implications of these findings for social work practice in the ASEAN region.

In sum, this study not only seeks to portray the realities of female-headed households in Indonesia but also offers a critical perspective on how social work practices can be transformed to uphold social justice, gender equality, and sustainable community development in Southeast Asia

Methodology

Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, aiming to understand the social experiences, adaptive strategies, and socio-economic resilience of female-headed households (FHHs), locally referred to as *Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (PEKKA)*, in their daily lives. This approach

was chosen to explore the meanings underlying social actions and relational dynamics that cannot be quantified (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Qualitative research provides an opportunity for the researcher to interpret social realities in depth, considering cultural context, values, and individual perceptions. In this study, female household heads are positioned as active subjects with agency, rather than mere objects of social policy. The descriptive design allows for a systematic depiction of how FHHs manage their productive and reproductive roles and to identify the forms of power that support their social resilience (Rustanto, 2015).

Research Setting and Context

The study was conducted in Garut Regency, Indonesia, a region characterized by strong socio-cultural traditions, religiosity, and predominantly agrarian communities. Garut was selected due to the presence of active and diverse FHHs groups, representing a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and community activities. Garut exemplifies the general situation of female-headed households in rural Indonesia, where economic resources are limited but social strength is significant through community solidarity and spirituality. This makes it a relevant setting to explore gender and culture-based social resilience dynamics.

Research Subjects and Informants

The primary subjects of this study were female-headed households (FHHs), with five main informants selected based on their active participation in FHHs activities and diversity in age, education, occupation, and family status. To support data collection, 17 participants were involved, including FHHs members, community facilitators, and village cadres familiar with the social dynamics of female-headed households.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, considering the relevance of their social experiences. Additionally, snowball sampling was applied to identify informants with unique and in-depth experiences, particularly regarding spirituality and social solidarity.

Data Collection Techniques

Data for this study were systematically gathered using a combination of four primary data collection techniques, each carefully selected to capture multiple dimensions of the experiences of female-headed households (FHHs).

1. **In-Depth Interviews**
Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted to allow informants to share their experiences freely. Questions focused on adaptive strategies, household management, family resources, and social resilience. Each interview lasted 45–90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the informants' consent.
2. **Participant Observation**
The researcher observed FHHs group activities, such as weekly meetings, productive economic activities, and religious gatherings. This helped capture real behaviors and social interactions among group members.
3. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**
Three FGD sessions were conducted, each with 6–8 participants. The FGDs aimed to validate individual interview results and explore collective perspectives on social solidarity, group cooperation, and shared spiritual experiences.
4. **Document Review**
Collected documents included FHHs activity reports, data from the Garut Regency Population, Family Planning, Women's Empowerment, and Child Protection Office (DPPKBP3A) Garut, Indonesia, relevant policy documents on women and family empowerment, and reputable national and international academic literature.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis as developed by Braun & Clarke (2006), following six stages:

1. Reading and familiarizing with the entire dataset;
2. Identifying units of meaning and generating initial codes;
3. Grouping codes into major themes;
4. Reviewing relationships among themes to identify broader patterns;
5. Naming and defining each theme;
6. Constructing a thematic narrative representing informants' social experiences.

Analysis was conducted inductively, meaning themes emerged from the field data rather than being imposed by pre-existing theory.

Data Validity and Reliability

To ensure data validity and credibility, the study adhered to four qualitative trustworthiness criteria (Goldberg & Allen, 2024)

1. Credibility: achieved through source triangulation (informants, facilitators, and documents) and member checking with primary informants;
2. Transferability: ensured via detailed descriptions of social context, allowing findings to be applied in similar settings;
3. Dependability: supported by field notes, transcripts, and documented research logs;
4. Confirmability: maintained through critical reflection and peer discussion to minimize interpretive bias.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established principles of social work research ethics to ensure that the entire research process was conducted in a responsible, professional, and ethically sound manner, safeguarding the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants involved:

1. Informed Consent: informants received full explanations of the research objectives, data confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time;
2. Confidentiality: all informants' identities were anonymized using initials;
3. Non-maleficence: the researcher ensured no negative psychological impact or pressure on informants;
4. Reciprocity: the researcher provided feedback to FHHs groups through preliminary result discussions to enhance participants' reflective capacity.

Research Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, as a qualitative study conducted in a specific locality, findings are contextually bound and not intended for statistical generalization. Second, the small number of key informants (five) may not fully capture the diversity of experiences among female-headed households across Garut Regency. Third, the use of snowball sampling within a tight-knit FHHs community network may have introduced social desirability bias, as participants may have been reluctant to share negative experiences within their own group. Finally, the researcher's positionality as an academic and social work practitioner may have influenced data interpretation, though this was mitigated through reflexive journaling and peer discussion during the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Results

Characteristics of Female-Headed Household Informants

The primary informants of this study consisted of five female-headed households (FHHs), locally referred to as *Perempuan Kepala Keluarga* (PEKKA). Detailed profiles of the informants are presented below to illustrate the diversity of socio-economic backgrounds, family compositions, and household responsibilities.

Mrs. Mawar is 36 years old and holds a senior high school diploma. She currently works as an administrative staff at a sub-community health center in Garut Regency and serves as a community cadre. Her monthly income averages IDR 467,000, which is irregular. Mrs. Mawar assumes the role of household head as her husband works outside the city and returns only every six months. She is the primary decision-maker, managing all household needs for seven household members, including her children, in-laws, and a younger sibling-in-law with a child.

Mrs. Lily, aged 53, completed elementary equivalency education (Package A). She runs a small morning business selling traditional yellow rice with fluctuating income. Her husband, over 70 years old, suffers from chronic illness, leaving her as the primary decision-maker. She is responsible for the welfare of 17 household members, including adult children who provide partial support while residing in the same home. Mrs. Lily is described as tall, gentle, and maternal, with a calm and soothing presence. Mrs. Melati, 31 years old, is assertive, energetic, and caring. She holds a senior high school diploma and is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree. To fulfill her role as household head, she engages in multiple income-generating activities, including working as a private ojek driver and running a small business. She earns approximately IDR 1,000,000 per month from various sources to cover daily living expenses and college costs. Mrs. Melati became a household head following her divorce in December 2024. Her children reside with her ex-husband, and she currently lives with her parents, who support her basic needs. She is also an active FHHs cadre involved in educational and skills development programs.

Mrs. Rose, 38 years old, completed junior high school (SMP). She is robust, expressive, and socially outgoing, often displaying strong emotions while sharing her life experiences. She previously worked as a domestic assistant and child caregiver, though she had to stop due to her husband's restrictions. With her husband earning irregular income and recently falling ill, Mrs. Rose bears full responsibility for household decision-making and the welfare of eight family members, including five children, two of whom are twins. She is a recipient of the Government's Family Hope Program (Program Keluarga Harapan/PKH), receiving IDR 600,000 per disbursement.

Mrs. Dahlia, aged 55, completed elementary school. She appears modest, of medium height and slim build, and occasionally experiences minor health issues. She became a household head following her husband's death and resides with twelve family members, including children, in-laws, and grandchildren. Mrs. Dahlia continues her late husband's sewing business, managing production with the assistance of her adult and school-age children. Daily income ranges from IDR 50,000 to IDR 200,000, which is insufficient to meet the family's needs.

Table 1. Characteristics of Female-Headed Household Informants.

Informant	Age (years)	Last Education	Source of Income	Number of Family Members	Reason for Becoming FHHs
Mrs. Mawar	36	Senior High School	Honorary health worker	7	Husband works outside the city
Mrs. Lily	53	Elementary School	Trader	17	Husband is elderly and chronically ill
Mrs. Melati	31	Senior High School	Online motorcycle taxi driver	Lives with parents	Divorced
Mrs. Rose	38	Junior High School	Casual laborer	8	Husband is unemployed and does not provide financial support
Mrs. Dahlia	55	Elementary School	Tailor	12	Husband passed away

Source: Research results, 2025.

Overall, these informants represent a spectrum of socio-economic realities and household compositions among FHHs in Garut Regency, highlighting their roles as primary decision-makers, income providers, and caregivers within their families. Their diverse experiences underscore the complexity of adaptive strategies and the socio-economic resilience inherent in female-headed households.

Adaptive Strategies of Female-Headed Households in Managing Household Responsibilities

The findings reveal that female-headed households (FHHs), locally referred to as *Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (PEKKA)*, employ various adaptive strategies to manage household responsibilities alongside economic and caregiving demands. At least four main strategies were identified based on the experiences of the informants. These strategies are outlined as follows.

1. Leaving the House Only After Completing Household Responsibilities

One prominent strategy adopted by FHHs is prioritizing household responsibilities before engaging in activities outside the home. This strategy is considered crucial in ensuring that urgent domestic tasks are completed, thereby contributing to household harmony.

Mrs. Mawar, for instance, reported completing all household duties—such as taking care of her parents' clothing, preparing family meals, and fulfilling other domestic obligations—before leaving the house. Only after these responsibilities were completed did she engage in other activities beyond household work. This was reflected in her interview statement:

"All activities at home must be finished first—preparing food for the children, taking them to school, and taking care of my parents. Only after that can I continue working or spend time with others. That way, I stay informed and avoid stress." (Mawar, July 2025)

This finding indicates that prioritizing domestic responsibilities serves as a foundational strategy for FHHs in balancing household and external roles.

2. Entrusting Childcare to Relatives

Another adaptive strategy involves entrusting childcare responsibilities to relatives, either within or outside the household. This strategy is employed to address the limited time available for childcare due to work obligations. Mrs. Mawar, as an FHHs facing such constraints, relied on her relatives to care for her child while she worked. By doing so, she experienced a greater sense of security and emotional comfort regarding her child's well-being. As she explained:

"I leave my child with my sister-in-law, so I feel more comfortable and calmer while working." (Mawar, July 2025).

A similar strategy was also adopted by Mrs. Rose. When she went to work, her child was entrusted to relatives, including siblings, parents-in-law, or an older sibling who was not attending school. This pattern highlights the importance of extended family networks in supporting FHHs.

3. Division of Household Tasks with Other Family Members

Some informants managed household responsibilities by sharing tasks with other family members, such as parents, siblings, or in-laws. This division of labor allowed FHHs to reduce their domestic burden while continuing income-generating activities.

Mrs. Melati, for example, divided household responsibilities with her parents suggesting they handled food preparation and household cleanliness. Meanwhile, her former husband was assigned childcare responsibilities, as legal custody of the children was under his authority. Mrs. Mawar also practiced a similar strategy by delegating unfinished household tasks to her sister-in-law when necessary.

In contrast, Mrs. Rose reported managing all household tasks independently, including cooking, washing clothes, washing dishes, and cleaning the house, without assistance from other family members. This variation reflects differing levels of familial support among FHHs.

4. Praying to God as a Source of Emotional and Spiritual Strength

The final strategy identified among FHHs involves spiritual coping through prayer. Informants emphasized that prayer serves as a means of enhancing spirituality and achieving inner calm when facing life pressures.

Mrs. Lily expressed that prayer, sincerity, and faith in God became essential sources of emotional strength in her daily life. As she stated:

"I believe that if I continue to make efforts and pray, there will always be a way. Sometimes it is not money that makes us strong, but faith." (Lily, July 2025)

This finding suggests that spiritual practices play a significant role in strengthening the emotional resilience of FHHs when managing household and economic challenges.

Adaptive Strategies of Female-Headed Households in Managing Resources

Resources refer to all assets that possess use value and can be utilized to meet needs, solve problems, or generate outcomes. The findings indicate that female-headed households (FHHs), locally referred to as Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (PEKKA), employ several adaptive strategies to manage available resources in order to strengthen household socio-economic resilience.

As illustrated in the figure, three main strategies were identified, ranging from optimizing personal skills to utilizing government assistance programs. These strategies are explained below.

1. Optimizing Personal Skills

One prominent strategy employed by FHHs involves maximizing personal skills to optimize the use of available resources. Informants emphasized that individual capabilities play a crucial role in transforming limited assets into productive resources.

Mrs. Melati, the youngest FHHs informant, explained that she utilized her personal skills—such as cooking, bread making, and trading—to maximize the use of household resources, including kitchen equipment, electronic devices, and other available assets. She stated: *"I just use whatever equipment I have to work—making bread, selling coconuts. I use simple kitchen tools like pots, mixers, and blenders. I also use my mobile phone to promote my products to neighbors. The key is maximizing personal skills to make use of what is available."* (Melati, July 2025)

Similarly, Mrs. Mawar highlighted the importance of skills obtained through training programs. According to her, such skills are highly valuable for managing key resources, particularly financial and time resources. She explained: *"Yes, improving personal skills is very important, especially basic skills in household management, such as financial management and other related abilities."* (Mawar, July 2025).

These findings suggest that skill enhancement enables FHHs to utilize resources more effectively despite material limitations.

2. Utilizing Household Assets for Productive Activities

Another adaptive strategy involves orienting resource use toward productive activities. Informants reported that household assets should be actively utilized to generate benefits and contribute to household welfare.

Mrs. Melati emphasized that household resources such as kitchen equipment, vehicles, electronic devices, and other productive items must be used for meaningful and income-generating activities. As she noted: *“All items should be used—old items, simple items—for daily needs and productive activities. It would be a waste if useful items were left unused.”* (Melati, July 2025)

A more extreme example was observed in Mrs. Dahlia’s case. Facing limited food resources, particularly rice, she adopted an adaptive strategy by transforming a small quantity of rice into porridge. This approach allowed the food to be sufficient for all twelve family members without additional side dishes, as long as basic seasoning was available. This practice illustrates how FHHs creatively manage scarce resources to ensure household food security.

3. Rehabilitating Substandard Housing through Government Programs

The final strategy identified involves accessing government assistance programs, particularly housing rehabilitation initiatives. Social proximity and communication between FHHs and local authorities were found to play an important role in facilitating access to such programs.

Mrs. Dahlia reported that her house was assessed by local government officials as unfit for habitation. Because the land was privately owned and supported by community leaders, her house was proposed for rehabilitation through a government housing assistance program. She explained: *“The neighborhood and community leaders were very attentive. Because the land belongs to me, the community leader proposed my house to be renovated with support from the government.”* (Dahlia, July 2025)

This finding demonstrates that institutional support and social connections are critical resources that enable FHHs to improve their living conditions and enhance household resilience.

Discussion

Economic Resilience: Adaptation and Innovation Amid Constraints

The findings indicate that female-headed households (FHHs), locally referred to as Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (PEKKA), in Garut develop diverse economic strategies to ensure household survival. Most informants are engaged in the informal sector, including small-scale trading, honorary or casual employment, tailoring, and home-based service work. Many FHHs simultaneously engage in more than one income-generating activity as a strategy to stabilize household income.

However, it is important to critically note that livelihood diversification among FHHs is not merely a voluntary choice but a structural necessity driven by systemic gender inequalities, limited access to formal employment, and the absence of adequate social protection (Dominelli & Campling, 2017). This reflects a broader pattern of feminized poverty in which women are compelled to absorb economic shocks through informal and precarious labor arrangements rather than through institutionalized support systems.

This phenomenon is consistent with the findings of Ekaputri et al. (2025), who emphasize that female-headed households in Indonesia play a critical role in sustaining household economic stability despite structural financial constraints. To cope with income volatility and economic uncertainty, FHHs employ livelihood diversification strategies as a key adaptive response (Kadir et al., 2025). Such strategies enable households to reduce vulnerability and enhance economic resilience in precarious conditions.

Social and Emotional Resilience: Solidarity as a Buffer Against Crisis

Social resilience among FHHs in Garut is strengthened through robust social relationships within female-headed household groups. These groups function not only as social networks but also as spaces for emotional support. Through regular meetings, training activities, rotating savings groups (arisan), and collective religious gatherings, members share experiences, exchange motivation, and foster a sense of collective belonging.

This context demonstrates that social solidarity operates as a social coping mechanism that enhances emotional resilience among FHHs. Supporting this finding, Prasetyo et al. (2024) show that collective spirituality and post-pandemic women’s activities in Indonesia serve as platforms for psychosocial recovery and the reinforcement of social bonds.

From a social work perspective, FHHs groups can be conceptualized as natural helping systems—forms of informal support that emerge organically from community initiatives (Dunst & Trivette, 2009).

Within a strength-based social work approach, such systems are not viewed as objects of intervention but rather as social assets that should be recognized (Caiels et al., 2021).

Theoretical Analysis: Social Resilience as a Dynamic Process

The research findings demonstrate that the social resilience of female heads of households is not a static condition, but rather a dynamic, evolving process. This resilience is formed through the interaction of three layers of empowerment:

Table 2. Three Dimensions of Empowerment of Female Heads of Households

Dimension of Power	Key Resources	Resilience
Power Within	Personal emotional strength	Emotional resilience
Power With	Social solidarity and group networks	Social resilience
Power To	Capacity for action and public participation	Structural resilience and social change

This table illustrates that the social resilience of female-headed households (FHHs), locally referred to as Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (PEKKA), emerges from the integration of personal strength (individual agency) and collective strength (social support), reinforced by enabling social structures and inclusive policies. The social resilience of FHHs reflects the spirit of “*Domba Garut*” — where individual agency and collective support dynamically reinforce one another, enabling FHHs to confront socioeconomic vulnerabilities with courage and tenacity.

These findings support the perspective of UN Women (2024), which emphasizes that women’s empowerment becomes effective when there is a shift from short-term assistance toward capacity building and the strengthening of social structures that enable women to exercise self-determination (Staab et al., 2024). In this sense, resilience among FHHs is not solely an individual outcome but a socially constructed process facilitated by supportive institutional and community environments.

Regional Implications: Lessons from Indonesia for the ASEAN Context

The findings from Garut, Indonesia hold significant regional relevance for the ASEAN context. Many member states face comparable challenges in addressing the needs of female-headed households within patriarchal social structures and limited welfare systems. In Malaysia, Rahman et al. (2024) documented that female-headed households in urban Kuala Lumpur and Selangor similarly rely on informal kinship networks and community solidarity as primary coping mechanisms, mirroring the FHHs group dynamics observed in this study. However, Malaysian FHHs face additional barriers related to ethnic stratification and urban housing costs that complicate access to government assistance programs. In Vietnam, Tran et al., (2023) found that upland female-headed households employ livelihood diversification strategies comparable to those identified in Garut, yet ethnic minority women face compounded disadvantages due to intersecting inequalities of gender, ethnicity, and geographic remoteness. This suggests that while adaptive strategies may be structurally similar across ASEAN, their effectiveness is mediated by local socio-cultural and institutional contexts.

These cross-national parallels suggest that the strength-based community empowerment model exemplified by FHHs in Indonesia — integrating economic skill-building, social solidarity, and spiritual resilience — holds transferable value for social work policy and practice across Southeast Asia. As emphasized in the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025, regional cooperation should prioritize culturally sensitive, community-based approaches that recognize women’s agency rather than positioning them solely as welfare recipients. As emphasized in the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025, social work and social development in Southeast Asia should prioritize empowerment, cultural sensitivity, solidarity, and community-based practice (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). The Indonesian experience demonstrates that a strength-based approach—integrating spirituality, social solidarity, and women’s economic empowerment—can enhance family resilience while simultaneously contributing to grassroots-level social development.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that female-headed households (FHHs), locally referred to as Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (PEKKA), in Garut, Indonesia possess strong adaptive capacities in responding to complex social, economic, and cultural pressures. Using a qualitative approach from a social work perspective, the findings reveal that family resilience among FHHs does not emerge spontaneously but

is the result of deliberate, contextual, and strength-based adaptive strategies grounded in both personal and collective resources. In managing household responsibilities, FHHs employ strategies such as prioritizing domestic roles, utilizing kinship networks for childcare, sharing responsibilities with other family members, and strengthening spirituality through prayer and religious beliefs. These strategies reflect the ability of female heads of household to balance multiple role demands while maintaining emotional stability and family harmony despite limited resources.

In terms of resource management, FHHs demonstrate adaptive capacity through the optimization of personal skills, the productive use of household assets, and the ability to access and utilize government support programs. The practice of livelihood diversification underscores that household economic resilience is constructed through innovation, efficiency, and the strategic use of locally available opportunities.

Theoretically, this study affirms that the social resilience of female-headed households is a dynamic process shaped by the interaction of three dimensions of empowerment: power within, power with, and power to. Emotional resilience derived from internal strength, social solidarity embedded in group networks, and the capacity to act and participate in social spaces collectively form the foundation of socio-economic resilience. These findings reinforce the relevance of women's empowerment frameworks and the strength-based approach in social work, which conceptualize female-headed households not merely as vulnerable groups but as social actors with agency, capabilities, and valuable resources.

Furthermore, findings from the local context of Garut have broader regional implications for the ASEAN region, where similar challenges persist, including the feminization of poverty, gender inequality, and the increasing prevalence of female-headed households. The adaptive strategies developed by FHHs in Indonesia may serve as a regional learning model for the development of community-based social work policies and practices that integrate economic empowerment, social solidarity, and local cultural and spiritual values.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of strengthening natural support systems for female-headed households through culturally sensitive, capacity-oriented social work interventions that also encourage structural transformation. Such approaches contribute not only to enhanced family resilience but also to more inclusive gender, social development at both community and regional levels.

Suggestion

Governments, particularly through Dinas Sosial and DPPKBP3A at the kabupaten level, should integrate gender-inclusive empowerment programs into local development planning mechanisms such as RPJMD, with FHHs groups formally recognized as strategic community partners. Social workers and community facilitators are encouraged to adopt strength-based, asset-mapping approaches in working with female-headed households, moving beyond deficit-oriented assessments. Finally, Governments at all levels should strengthen gender-inclusive policies and social protection programs for female-headed households through concrete, targeted mechanisms, while ASEAN regional bodies facilitate structured cross-country policy transfer platforms that enable member states to adapt and replicate successful community empowerment models across shared socio-economic contexts.

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