



Caring Across Borders: Family Resilience among Indonesian Migrant Worker Families in the Gembok Katresnan Program

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Abstract

International labour migration can improve household economies while also producing emotional distance, role redistribution, and marital vulnerability. Existing studies on transnational families have examined left-behind children, mediated care, and the psychosocial costs of separation, but less attention has been paid to village-based initiatives that organize commitment and family support before, during, and after migration. This qualitative case study examines the Gembok Katresnan Program in Bringinan Village, Ponorogo, Indonesia, as a locally embedded mechanism for strengthening family resilience among Indonesian migrant worker households. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight participants, non-participant observation, and analysis of national, district, and village regulations on migrant worker protection. The findings show that Gembok Katresnan supports resilience through four interrelated mechanisms: publicly witnessed marital commitment, continuity of communication and family responsibility across borders, village-based protective infrastructure, and moral-religious meanings of endurance. The study argues that resilience in migrant worker families is not only an interpersonal capacity, but is co-constructed through social witnessing, local regulation, mediation, and Islamic moral vocabularies such as amanah, sabr, ikhtiar, tawakal, and sakinah. The article contributes to family resilience and transnational care scholarship by showing how village governance may become a meso-level infrastructure for sustaining family life across borders.

Keywords: Community-Based Support; Family Resilience; Gembok Katresnan; Indonesian Migrant Workers; Transnational Care

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INTRODUCTION

International labour migration is one of the major social processes reshaping family life in migrant-sending communities. For many households, migration is not simply an individual economic decision but a family strategy that redistributes care, authority, obligation, and risk across geographical distance. This strategy may improve material security through remittances, yet it can simultaneously generate emotional absence, marital strain, uncertainty, and reorganization of everyday family roles (Graham and Jordan 2011; Graham, Jordan, and Yeoh 2015; Lu 2012).

Studies on transnational families have shown that separation does not necessarily lead to family breakdown. Families continue to “do family” through mediated communication, delegated caregiving, emotional reassurance, remittances, and moral commitments that circulate across borders (Baldassar and Merla 2014; Baldassar et al. 2016; Graham et al. 2012). Indonesian studies similarly indicate that parental migration may affect left-behind children and caregivers, but families also develop adaptive strategies to sustain relatedness despite physical separation (Fauk et al. 2024; Kumar 2021). These insights shift the analysis from a deficit-oriented view of migration to the processes through which families maintain relational continuity under conditions of absence.

This study adopts the Family Resilience Framework as its main analytical lens. Family resilience refers not to the heroic endurance of isolated individuals but to the capacity of families as relational systems to withstand adversity, reorganize roles, make meaning of stress, and sustain communication and problem-solving processes (Walsh 2003; Patterson 2002). However, resilience in migrant worker households should not be analysed only inside the household. It is also shaped by social support, local institutions, legal frameworks, and community-based mechanisms that influence how families interpret, manage, and mediate prolonged separation.

The Indonesian legal context is especially relevant because national migrant protection is formally directed not only to migrant workers but also to their families. Law No. 18 of 2017 defines the protection of Indonesian migrant workers as a set of efforts to protect prospective migrant workers, migrant workers, and their families before, during, and after work in legal, economic, and social aspects (Republic of Indonesia 2017). At the district level, Ponorogo Regional Regulation No. 7 of 2021 recognizes families of CPMI and PMI as spouses, children, or parents and frames protection as a means to secure rights and welfare before, during, and after placement (Ponorogo Regency Government 2021). At the village level, Bringinan Village Regulation No. 6 of 2019 establishes a protection framework that includes data registration, document services, information services, complaint services, access to communication, organizing and networking, empowerment for migrant workers and family members, rehabilitation, collective agreements, financing, and supervision (Bringinan Village Government 2019).

This legal orientation is consistent with broader international and programmatic discussions on migrant worker protection. IOM reporting frames migration as a social process that affects not only workers but also families and communities (International Organization for Migration 2025). In Indonesia, ILO and IOM initiatives have emphasized village- and district-level support through information services, referral pathways, legal assistance, psychosocial support, reintegration, and gender-responsive assistance for migrant workers and their families (International Labour Organization 2024; International Organization for Migration Indonesia 2021). This perspective strengthens the relevance of Bringinan as a village-level case of migrant worker family protection.

Bringinan Village is a distinctive case because migration has long been part of local household strategies. Village data indicate that Bringinan once recorded 341 residents working



abroad in 2012, nearly 30 percent of the village population at that time, while current active PMI numbers are estimated at around 50 to 80 people. Major destination countries include Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea. The village therefore represents not only a migrant-sending locality but also a community where migration governance, family protection, and symbolic intervention have become part of everyday village administration.

It is in this context that the Gembok Katresnan Program becomes analytically significant. Formalized through Village Head Regulation No. 6 of 2023, the program asks married prospective migrant workers and their families to participate in a public symbolic commitment before departure. The symbolic padlock does not merely represent romantic attachment. It is embedded in a broader village protection regime that documents migrant mobility, encourages communication, discourages unilateral divorce, and provides mediation when family conflict emerges. In this article, Gembok Katresnan is therefore treated neither as a cultural ornament nor as a simple anti-divorce campaign, but as a village-based mechanism through which marital responsibility, transnational care, and local protection are socially organized.

The novelty of this study is located in its meso-level focus. Earlier studies have examined the psychological well-being of left-behind children and caregivers (Graham and Jordan 2011; Graham, Jordan, and Yeoh 2015), care circulation in transnational families (Baldassar and Merla 2014; Reynolds and Zontini 2014), ICT-based co-presence (Baldassar et al. 2016), and social support in migrant-sending areas (Lu 2012). By comparison, this article examines how a village-level initiative publicly structures commitment, communication, and accountability in a migrant-sending community. The study does not claim that Gembok Katresnan directly prevents divorce in a causal sense. Rather, it asks how the program is experienced, interpreted, and institutionalized as a support mechanism for family resilience.

This article is guided by three questions: (1) how do migrant workers and their families understand commitment, care, and responsibility across borders; (2) how does the Gembok Katresnan Program mediate these processes through village-based protection and public witnessing; and (3) how can these dynamics be interpreted through family resilience, transnational care, social support, and Islamic psychological meanings of responsibility and endurance?

METHODS

Research Design

This study used a qualitative case study design to examine the Gembok Katresnan Program as a bounded village-based initiative embedded in a specific legal, cultural, and social context (Yin 2018; Creswell and Poth 2018). A case study design was appropriate because the research did not seek to measure the program's causal effect on divorce rates, but to understand how the program was experienced, interpreted, and enacted by migrant workers, families, and village actors.

The case was analysed through a theory-informed interpretive strategy. The Family Resilience Framework provided the main conceptual lens, while transnational care, social support, and Islamic psychology were used as complementary interpretive perspectives. This analytical combination allowed the study to examine not only household adaptation but also public witnessing, village mediation, and moral-religious meanings of responsibility.



Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted in Bringinan Village, Jambon District, Ponorogo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The site was selected purposively because Bringinan is a migrant-sending rural community with a layered protection framework. Nationally, migrant protection is grounded in Law No. 18 of 2017. District-level protection is regulated through Ponorogo Regional Regulation No. 7 of 2021. Village-level protection is organized through Bringinan Village Regulation No. 6 of 2019 and the Gembok Katresnan initiative is formalized through Village Head Regulation No. 6 of 2023.

Bringinan is analytically important because migration is not marginal to local life. Village data indicate that 341 residents were recorded as working abroad in 2012, while current active PMI numbers are estimated at 50 to 80 people. This historical intensity of migration helps explain why the village developed administrative, communicative, and symbolic mechanisms for migrant worker protection.

Participants and Data Sources

Participants were selected purposively because they were directly involved in, affected by, or knowledgeable about the Gembok Katresnan Program. The study involved eight interview participants: two village officials, four PMI or returnee PMI, and two left-behind family members. In addition to interviews, the study used legal documents and field observation as supplementary data sources. Table 1 summarizes the participant groups, documentary sources, and their contribution to the analysis. To reduce the risk of personal identification in a relatively small village, all interview participants are represented by interview codes. The institutional roles of village officials are described because they are directly relevant to the analysis, but personal names are not used in the presentation of findings.

Table 1. Participants and Data Sources

Group/Data Source	Participants or Materials	Number	Contribution to Data
Village officials	SBN and KDN	2	Program background, legal basis, implementation procedures, village mediation, and protection logic
PMI or returnee PMI	NMTN, TW, WSN, and KN	4	Experiences of emotional security, commitment, family communication, and moral meaning of migration
Left-behind family members	AHMD and YNT	2	Family-level perspectives on trust, economic pressure, children's education, and symbolic participation
Legal and institutional documents	Law No. 18/2017; Ponorogo Regional Regulation No. 7/2021; Bringinan Village Regulation No. 6/2019; Village Head Regulation No. 6/2023; village data on PMI	5 document sets	Legal and institutional context for analysing protection, communication, agreements, mediation, and program formalization

Field observation	Village setting, program symbols, and public setting of the padlock ritual	1 observation set	Contextual understanding of the public and symbolic setting of Gembok Katresnan
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Note. PMI refers to Indonesian migrant worker. Interview participants are identified using codes to protect confidentiality. SBN and KDN refer to village officials; NMTN, TW, WSN, and KN refer to PMI or returnee PMI; AHMD and YNT refer to left-behind family members. This was necessary because the study was conducted in a relatively small village and involved sensitive issues related to migration, marriage, family responsibility, and marital conflict. Relational descriptions are kept general to reduce the risk of indirect identification.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted between September 2025 and February 2026. Interview topics included migration decision-making, family separation, marital commitment, communication across borders, emotional strain, village involvement, perceived benefits and limits of the program, and moral-religious interpretations of endurance.

Interviews were originally conducted in Indonesian and, where relevant, in Javanese conversational expressions. Direct quotations used in this article were translated into English by the authors and checked against the Indonesian interview notes to preserve intended meaning rather than literal word-for-word equivalence. The quotation notes were reviewed during analysis to ensure consistency between participants' statements and the analytical claims made in the manuscript.

Documentary data were analysed as institutional data, not merely as background information. The legal documents were read to identify how protection, family responsibility, communication, complaint handling, joint agreements, empowerment, and village authority were formally articulated across national, district, and village levels. These documentary categories were then compared with interview data to examine whether and how formal provisions were reflected in participants' experiences.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). The analysis involved five steps. First, the interview notes, observation notes, and documentary materials were read repeatedly to gain familiarity with the case. Second, initial codes were generated around recurring issues such as commitment, trust, communication, emotional calm, anxiety, family responsibility, village mediation, and moral-religious language. Third, codes were grouped into candidate themes. Fourth, the themes were compared across participant groups and documentary sources. Fifth, the final themes were interpreted through the lenses of family resilience, transnational care, social support, and Islamic psychology.

The analysis deliberately separated empirical evidence from interpretation. Findings sections first present what participants said or what documents regulate, followed by analytical interpretation. This structure was used to avoid turning the findings into an overly conceptual discussion without sufficient grounding in field data.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, method triangulation, member reflection, and thick description (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Tracy 2010). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing the accounts of village officials, PMI, and family members. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing interviews, observation, and legal documents. Member reflection was conducted by checking selected factual descriptions and the intended meaning of key quotations with participants or field contacts when clarification was needed.

The study involved sensitive issues related to migration, family separation, marital vulnerability, and economic pressure. Therefore, direct personal identifiers are minimized in the presentation of findings, especially for PMI and family members. The analysis avoids unnecessary details that could expose specific households in a small village context. The study also does not claim that the program directly reduces divorce; it analyses how participants and village documents frame the program as a preventive and supportive mechanism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Publicly Witnessed Commitment as Institutionalized Marital Accountability

The first finding concerns the way Gembok Katresnan transforms marital commitment from a private promise into a publicly witnessed and institutionally mediated obligation. In Bringinan Village, migration was not understood only as a strategy for improving household income, but also as a condition that could expose families to emotional distance, suspicion, marital instability, and divorce. This concern was clearly articulated by SBN, the village officials of Bringinan, who linked the establishment of Village Head Regulation Number 6 of 2023 to repeated vulnerabilities experienced by migrant worker families:

“...to anticipate the growing number of cases affecting migrant worker families, I enacted Village Head Regulation Number 6 of 2023... which stipulates that couples preparing to become migrant workers are required to participate in the ‘Gembok Katresnan’ program in order to preserve the moral, emotional, and psychological well-being of migrant worker families.” (Interview with SBN, village officials of Bringinan, 28 September 2025)

This statement shows that the program was not designed merely as a ritual or ceremonial act. It was framed by village leadership as a preventive mechanism through which marital commitment could be made visible, witnessed, and socially reinforced before migration. SBN’s own experience as a former migrant worker also shaped this concern. He explained that, after returning from Malaysia, he became more aware of the vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers and their families, including the risk of divorce:

“I was also a former PMI in Malaysia. After returning home, I was moved to help build the village because I had experienced how PMI could be looked down upon abroad. With the many problems faced by PMI, including divorce, I created the Gembok Katresnan program as one form of ikhtiar to keep the household intact.” (village officials SBN, interview note, September 2025)



The same institutional logic was confirmed by KDN, the another Village Officials of Bringinan Village, who described the program as a form of village contribution to reducing divorce, motivating prospective migrant workers, educating families, and supporting the welfare of PMI households. His account indicates that Gembok Katresnan is positioned not only as a symbolic expression of marital fidelity, but also as part of a broader village-based effort to accompany families before and during migration.

Family-level data further show that this public commitment was not experienced merely as an administrative requirement. AHMD, the husband of a migrant worker, explained that village involvement through Gembok Katresnan helped both the migrant and the family at home feel more certain about the continuity of the household, especially under economic pressure and the need to support children's education:

“With the village's involvement through the Gembok Katresnan program, both the PMI and the family feel more convinced and less worried about the continuity of our family. Our economy is modest and we still have children who need school fees, so I can continue working with confidence because I believe my wife there is thinking the same way.” (AHMD Family Member, interview note, 25 October 2025)

Another family member, YNT, who represented his daughter in the padlock installation, interpreted the act as a symbolic commitment to maintain family unity after migration. His account is important because it shows that Gembok Katresnan involves not only husband and wife, but also the wider family network that witnesses and morally supports the commitment:

“As a father, I represented my child in installing the Gembok Katresnan at the village hall as a symbol of commitment to maintain family unity after becoming a PMI. I hope my child remains a good mother and wife at home.” (YNT Family Member, interview note, 11 October 2025)

These accounts suggest that public witnessing is central to the resilience mechanism of Gembok Katresnan. The padlock does not guarantee fidelity, eliminate suspicion, or directly prevent divorce. Rather, it creates a socially visible moral reminder that links marital fidelity, family responsibility, and village-based accountability. In family resilience terms, the program strengthens a shared belief system around commitment, endurance, and future-oriented responsibility. However, the evidence also cautions against overstating the claim. Gembok Katresnan is better understood as a symbolic and institutional support mechanism that helps organize marital accountability, rather than as a direct causal solution to divorce among migrant worker families.

Communication as Institutionalized Continuity of Care across Borders

The second finding concerns the role of communication in sustaining family resilience across separation. The data indicate that resilience in migrant worker families is not maintained by preserving pre-migration routines, but by reorganizing family life under conditions of absence. This involves redistributed roles, altered expectations, and the need to sustain emotional continuity without physical co-presence. In this context, communication emerges as a central mechanism. However, the significance of communication in this case is stronger than a general observation that



families need to stay in touch. Bringinan's regulatory framework explicitly gives communication an institutional role. Bringinan Village Regulation No. 6 of 2019 includes access to communication within the scope of PMI protection and requires systematic data registration before departure and after return. This legal framing matters because communication is not treated merely as private contact between spouses, but as part of family and worker protection.

Participants' accounts show that communication, trust, and moderated expectations from family members help reduce anxiety during overseas work. TW, who migrated to Hong Kong, explained that the agreement made before her departure influenced the way her husband supported the family relationship from home:

"Because of the agreement we made when I was about to leave for Hong Kong, my husband at home did not demand too much from me. He also tried to keep the family harmonious for the sake of our child and family." (TW, PMI participant, interview note, 14 February 2026)

This quotation indicates that communication is not experienced merely as informational exchange. Rather, it works through the reshaping of expectations between spouses. The program does not remove the hardship of separation, but it helps spouses interpret migration as a shared family project. In TW's account, the agreement before departure created a moral basis for communication in which the husband at home was expected not only to wait, but also to actively preserve harmony, reduce demands, and support the family's long-term goals.

This interpretation is reinforced by the account of AHMD, TW's husband, who described how village involvement through Gembok Katresnan reduced anxiety and strengthened confidence in the continuity of the household. His statement is important because it shows the perspective of the left-behind spouse, not only that of the migrant worker:

"With the village's involvement through the Gembok Katresnan program, both the PMI and the family feel more convinced and less worried about the continuity of our family. Our economy is modest and we still have children who need school fees, so I can continue working with confidence because I believe my wife there is thinking the same way." (AHMD Family member, interview note, 25 October 2025)

Taken together, these accounts show that communication in Gembok Katresnan is not limited to direct contact through phones, social media, or other digital platforms. It also includes emotional reassurance, moderated expectations, mutual trust, and shared orientation toward family goals. Communication therefore functions as a form of affective stabilization, but this stabilization is not produced by the migrant worker alone. It is co-produced by the migrant, the spouse who remains at home, and the village framework that makes commitment socially visible before departure.

Read through the lens of transnational care, this finding suggests that care across borders is sustained through more than remittances or occasional emotional reassurance. What is maintained through communication is the continuity of responsibility. The migrant worker remains morally present in the household by working, updating, reassuring, and orienting herself toward family needs, while the family at home remains present by sustaining trust, reducing unnecessary demands, maintaining household stability, and supporting children's education. The village regulation deepens this interpretation because it transforms communication into a recognized protective obligation rather than a matter of personal preference. The finding, therefore, is more precise than



simply saying that families communicate. It shows that communication functions as an institutionalized continuity of care, connecting household resilience to village-based protection.

Village-Based Support as Protective Infrastructure across the Migration Cycle

The third major finding is that Gembok Katresnan should be understood not as a stand-alone symbolic initiative, but as one element within a broader village-based protective infrastructure. This is evident both from the interviews and from the legal framework surrounding the program. The district regulation of Ponorogo explicitly assigns villages roles in document services, data collection, information management, case handling, and empowerment for returnee migrant workers and active migrant workers' family members. It also recognizes family members as rights-bearing subjects entitled to correct and timely information regarding the condition of migrant workers (Ponorogo Regency Government 2021). At the village level, the 2019 regulation expands this into a more operational arrangement covering complaints, communication access, networking, empowerment, rehabilitation, and joint agreements. At the national level, Law No. 18 of 2017 frames protection as extending to migrant workers and their families before, during, and after work. Together, these documents show that the program is embedded in a layered protection regime rather than a narrow village campaign.

This institutional reading is reinforced by the interview with KDN, who described Gembok Katresnan as a form of village concern for residents who become migrant workers in order to improve family welfare and economic conditions. He explained that the program is conducted publicly at the village hall and involves interviews, documentation procedures, the attendance of family representatives, and symbolic padlock placement witnessed by the village authorities. He stated:

"...the program is conducted at the Bringinan village hall and attended by the concerned parties as well as family representatives... it is then followed by hanging the two padlocks... as a symbol of the couple's mutual fidelity..." (Interview with KDN, Village Official of Bringinan, 1 October 2025)

Importantly, KDN further explained that any marital conflict must first be mediated through the village before divorce or separation decisions are taken:

"...if any conflict arises between the couple, it must first be mediated through the village and witnessed by the family, so that the program can minimize the occurrence of divorce..." (Interview with KDN)

These quotations are analytically important because they reveal that the village is not merely offering moral advice. It is organizing procedures of witnessing, documentation, mediation, and social supervision. This moves the program beyond symbolic encouragement and places it within the realm of protective social regulation.

The broader legal documents were analysed as institutional data to trace how protection was formally organized across levels of governance. Rather than being used only as background context, the documents were coded for provisions related to family rights, village responsibilities, data registration, communication access, complaint handling, paralegal assistance, empowerment, rehabilitation, and joint agreements. This analysis showed that Bringinan's village regulation operationalizes PMI protection through mechanisms such as continuous data registration, complaint

services, access to communication, and the possibility of forming paralegal support to identify, record, discuss, and assist in resolving problems reported by migrant workers and their families. It also requires village-based empowerment for migrant workers and their family members, including social and economic strengthening. At the district level, the regulation recognizes family members as rights-bearing subjects and mandates access to information, case handling, family-related empowerment during placement, entrepreneurial training for returnees, and financial management assistance. At the national level, Law No. 18 of 2017 assigns village governments roles in data verification, administrative facilitation, monitoring departure and return, and empowering migrant workers and their families. When read together with the interviews, these documents show that support in this case is not episodic. It spans the migration cycle, from pre-departure verification and documentation to communication during placement and empowerment after return. The village, therefore, appears as a meso-level institution that organizes not only support services but also the social and procedural conditions under which family resilience becomes more likely.

From an analytical standpoint, this is one of the strongest empirical themes in the study because it is supported by both interview data and documentary evidence. The findings suggest that Gembok Katresnan contributes to family resilience through three interrelated functions. First, it symbolically stabilizes commitment through public witnessing. Second, it helps sustain continuity of care by linking communication to a recognized protective framework. Third, it anchors families in a village-based support system that includes information, mediation, complaint handling, paralegal assistance, and empowerment across the migration cycle. Under this reading, family resilience is not produced solely inside the household. It is co-constructed through a village-mediated protective infrastructure that makes commitment visible, communication institutionally recognized, and support procedurally available.

Moral Meanings of Resilience: An Islamic Psychological Reading

Although the program is not formally framed as an Islamic psychological intervention, the interview data indicate that participants often interpret endurance, commitment, and separation through moral-religious language. KTM, for example, described the program as providing spiritual strength before departure and creating emotional calm for both the migrant worker and the spouse who remains at home. She explained:

“The village ritual program known as ‘Gembok Katresnan’ provides spiritual strength for migrant workers... and gives emotional reassurance to the spouses who remain in Indonesia...” (Interview with KTM, migrant worker in Hong Kong)

She further emphasized that patience, prayer, amanah, and tawakal became central moral resources during the migration period:

“...during years of separation, we strive to uphold trust and responsibility (amanah) toward one another and remain surrendered (tawakal) to Allah... we continue to maintain our mutual commitment...” (Interview with KTM)

These quotations are important because they demonstrate that resilience is not experienced solely as a functional adaptation to migration. It is also lived as an ethical and spiritual discipline. The family remains intact not merely through technical communication or emotional management,

but through the effort to remain morally accountable to one another before God, before the family, and before the obligations attached to marriage.

This moral interpretation also appeared in the accounts of migrant workers and their family members. NMTN described Gembok Katresnan as giving her a sense of inner comfort, as if she had a symbolic reminder to hold on to while working for a better family future. WSN similarly explained that, although the program was relatively new, it gave migrant workers a more positive feeling and reduced anxious thoughts about the family at home. From the family side, YNT's account of representing his daughter in installing the padlock at the village hall shows that the commitment is not understood only as a legal or administrative act. It is also interpreted as a moral hope that the migrant worker will remain responsible as a wife and mother after migration.

These accounts suggest that resilience is not experienced solely as functional adaptation to migration. It is also lived as moral self-regulation. In Islamic psychological terms, concepts such as *ikhtiar* (effort), *sabr* (patient endurance), *amanah* (trust and responsibility), and *tawakkul* (reliance on God after effort) provide a moral vocabulary through which participants can interpret separation as a test of responsibility rather than merely as emotional hardship. This interpretation is consistent with Islamic counselling and Islamic psychology literature, which emphasizes that psychological coping among Muslims is often intertwined with spiritual meaning, moral accountability, and the regulation of the self before God, family, and community (Rassool 2016; Rothman and Coyle 2018; Rothman 2021; Gumindari et al. 2022; Ariff 2025).

Rothman's model of Islamic psychology is particularly useful here because it argues that Islamic psychological interpretation should be grounded in Islamic understandings of the self, soul, moral agency, and spiritual development, rather than simply adding religious terminology to existing psychological models (Rothman 2021). In the present study, this perspective helps explain why participants' references to *ikhtiar*, *sabr*, *amanah*, and *tawakkul* should not be treated merely as devotional expressions. They also function as moral-psychological resources through which participants regulate anxiety, sustain responsibility, and make family separation meaningful. In this sense, the moral language used by participants links inner emotional endurance with relational accountability and spiritual orientation.

The Islamic psychological significance of the case therefore does not lie in claiming that Gembok Katresnan is a formal counselling model or a religious therapy. Rather, it lies in showing how moral-religious meanings become embedded in the way families understand endurance, fidelity, communication, and responsibility during migration. In this sense, the program's symbolic and institutional mechanisms are supported by a moral grammar that makes family resilience intelligible and worthwhile. At the same time, this interpretation should not be overstated. Not all participants necessarily used the same religious vocabulary or experienced the program in identical ways. The evidence shows more modestly that, for several participants, resilience was experienced simultaneously as relational work, village-mediated accountability, and moral self-regulation.

To clarify the relationship between empirical evidence, institutional mechanisms, and analytical interpretation, Table 2. summarizes the major findings of the study.

Tabel. 2. Analytical Summary of Family Resilience Mechanisms in the Gembok Katresnan Program

Major finding	Core evidence	Mechanism	Interpretation
Publicly witnessed commitment	Village head, village official, spouse, and family representative accounts	Public witnessing and padlock symbolism	Commitment becomes socially visible and morally accountable
Communication across borders	PMI and left-behind spouse accounts	Communication, moderated expectations, and trust	Care continues through shared responsibility despite distance
Village-based protective infrastructure	Interviews and coded legal documents	Documentation, mediation, complaint handling, paralegal support, empowerment	Resilience is supported by village-level protection across the migration cycle
Moral meanings of resilience	References to <i>ikhtiar</i> , comfort, hope, responsibility, and family duty	Moral-religious meaning-making	Resilience is lived as relational commitment and moral self-regulation

Discussion

This study examined how the Gembok Katresnan Program is experienced and institutionalized as a village-based support mechanism for family resilience among Indonesian migrant worker families in Bringinan Village. Given the small number of participants and the single-case design, the study does not claim to generate a new general theory of family resilience or to establish a causal relationship between Gembok Katresnan and reduced divorce. Its contribution is more appropriately understood as a case-based conceptual refinement. The findings suggest that, in this particular migrant-sending community, family resilience is mediated through the interaction of public witnessing, communication across distance, village-based protection, and moral-religious meaning.

This interpretation is consistent with the Family Resilience Framework, which understands resilience as the capacity of families to make meaning of adversity, reorganize roles, sustain communication, and mobilize resources under stress (Walsh 2003; Patterson 2002). However, the Bringinan case indicates that these processes are not located only inside the household. They are also shaped by village-level practices and institutional arrangements. This was visible in the way SBN framed Gembok Katresnan as an *ikhtiar* to maintain household unity among PMI families, and in KDN's explanation that the program aims to reduce divorce, educate prospective PMI, and support family welfare. These accounts show that family resilience in this case is not simply a matter of private endurance, but is supported by socially witnessed and locally organized mechanisms.

The first case-based insight concerns the public-symbolic dimension of marital commitment. In family resilience theory, belief systems are important because they help families interpret hardship and sustain hope. In Bringinan, this belief system is publicly staged through the padlock ritual. Pak Subarno's account shows that the program emerged from concern over repeated problems faced by PMI families, including marital instability and divorce. KDN's explanation further indicates that the program is implemented through interviews, documentation, family attendance,

and symbolic padlock installation at the village hall. These field data suggest that Gembok Katresnan does not merely express cultural symbolism. It makes marital commitment visible before the village and the wider family network.

Family-level accounts strengthen this interpretation. AHMD, the husband of a migrant worker, explained that village involvement made both the migrant and the family at home feel more certain and less worried about the continuity of the household. YNT, who represented his daughter in the padlock installation, interpreted the act as a symbol of commitment to maintain family unity after migration. These accounts prevent the analysis from relying only on official village narratives. They show that public witnessing is also meaningful for family members who experience the program as moral reassurance. Therefore, the study does not claim that the padlock guarantees fidelity or directly prevents divorce. A more careful interpretation is that Gembok Katresnan helps organize marital accountability by turning private commitment into a socially visible and institutionally supported obligation.

The second case-based insight concerns communication as continuity of care across borders. Studies on transnational families have shown that families continue to “do family” through mediated communication, remittances, delegated caregiving, emotional reassurance, and care circulation (Baldassar and Merla 2014; Baldassar et al. 2016; Graham et al. 2012). The Bringinan case supports this literature but adds a village-level dimension. Communication is not treated only as private contact between husband and wife. Bringinan Village Regulation No. 6 of 2019 includes access to communication within the scope of PMI protection, while the Gembok Katresnan process encourages families to maintain trust, communication, and shared responsibility during migration.

This point is grounded in the accounts of TW and AHMD. TW, who migrated to Hong Kong, explained that the agreement made before departure influenced the way her husband supported the family from home. He did not demand too much and tried to maintain harmony for the sake of their child and family. AHMD’s account as the left-behind husband confirms that confidence was not produced only by private trust, but also by the village’s role in formalizing and witnessing the commitment. These accounts suggest that communication in this case includes more than the exchange of information through phones or social media. It also includes moderated expectations, emotional reassurance, reduced suspicion, and shared orientation toward family goals. In this limited but analytically meaningful sense, care across borders appears as a circulation of responsibility: the migrant sustains the household economically and emotionally, while the family at home sustains trust, stability, and childcare.

The third case-based insight concerns the village as a meso-level protective institution. Migration studies often focus either on macro-level labour systems or on micro-level family adaptation. The Bringinan case suggests that the village level deserves closer attention because it connects legal protection, family support, and everyday practices of accountability. This claim is grounded not only in interviews but also in documentary analysis. The legal documents were analysed as institutional data by identifying provisions related to family rights, village responsibilities, data registration, communication access, complaint handling, paralegal assistance, empowerment, rehabilitation, and joint agreements. When read together with KDN’s account of interviews, documentation, public witnessing, and mediation procedures, these documents show that Gembok Katresnan is embedded in a broader protection framework rather than operating as an isolated symbolic initiative.

This finding also refines the role of social support in migrant worker families. Social support theory emphasizes the importance of emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support in buffering stress and strengthening coping (Cohen and Wills 1985; Thoits 2011). In Bringingan, these forms of support appear through information services, documentation, communication access, complaint mechanisms, mediation, family witnessing, empowerment, and post-return support. Yet the data also indicate that support is morally textured. AHMD's confidence and YNT's symbolic participation show that the village's involvement communicates that family continuity is publicly valued and collectively supported. Therefore, within this case, social support appears not merely as an external buffer around the family, but as part of the local conditions through which family members interpret and sustain commitment during migration.

The fourth case-based insight concerns moral-religious meaning. The Islamic psychological reading should be understood as an interpretive lens, not as a claim that Gembok Katresnan is a formal counselling model or religious therapy. Participants did not describe resilience only in administrative or psychological terms. SBN used the language of *ikhtiar* to describe the program as an effort to keep households intact. Nyamitun described the program as giving inner comfort while she worked for a better family future. WSN explained that the program helped reduce anxious thoughts and created more positive feelings about the family at home. YNT framed the padlock as a moral hope that his daughter would remain responsible as a wife and mother after migration.

These accounts can be read alongside Islamic counselling and Islamic psychology literature, which emphasizes that coping and well-being among Muslims are often intertwined with spiritual meaning, moral accountability, and self-regulation before God, family, and community (Rassool 2016; Rothman and Coyle 2018; Rothman 2021; Gumindari et al. 2022). Concepts such as *ikhtiar*, *sabr*, *amanah*, and *tawakkul* help interpret how several participants understood separation not only as hardship, but also as a test of responsibility and moral endurance. This claim should remain modest. Not all participants used the same religious vocabulary, and the study does not measure Islamic psychological constructs directly. What the data show is that, for several participants, family resilience was experienced through a combination of relational commitment, village-mediated accountability, and moral self-regulation.

Haque's (2004) discussion of psychology from an Islamic perspective is useful for strengthening this interpretation because it shows that Muslim intellectual traditions have long engaged with questions of human nature, self-knowledge, moral discipline, and psychological well-being. In the present study, this perspective helps situate participants' use of terms such as *ikhtiar*, *sabr*, *amanah*, and *tawakkul* within a broader Islamic psychological vocabulary. These terms are not treated as clinical constructs measured directly in the study, but as moral-psychological meanings through which participants interpret separation, regulate anxiety, and sustain family responsibility across distance.

This interpretation is also supported by the literature on Islamically integrated psychotherapy, which understands Islamic teachings, principles, and spiritual resources as potentially meaningful elements in psychological and relational support, especially when they are integrated with professional and culturally responsive practice (Al-Karam 2018). In this perspective, religious language such as *ikhtiar*, *sabr*, *amanah*, and *tawakkul* should not be read simply as doctrinal vocabulary. It may also function as a moral-psychological resource through which participants regulate anxiety, sustain responsibility, and interpret family separation within a spiritually meaningful framework. However, this reading must remain cautious. Al-Karam (2018)

also emphasizes that prayer, faith, and spiritual resources can provide comfort but should not be treated as a cure-all for psychological distress. This caution is important in the present study because Gembok Katresnan is not a formal therapy or counselling model, but a symbolic and institutional support mechanism whose meaning is partly shaped by participants' moral-religious interpretations.

Theoretically, this study offers a case-based refinement of family resilience and transnational care scholarship. It suggests that, in a migrant-sending village such as Bringinan, family resilience may be mediated not only through intra-family coping and communication, but also through public witnessing, village-based protection, and moral-religious interpretation. This does not mean that the findings can be generalized to all migrant worker families or all village-based programs. Rather, the case illustrates how commitment, communication, and accountability can be socially organized at the meso level of village governance. The study therefore contributes by drawing attention to the village as a site where family resilience, migrant protection, and moral accountability intersect.

Practically, the findings suggest that migrant worker protection should not be limited to recruitment safety, legal documentation, remittances, or economic reintegration. In migrant-sending communities, protection also needs to address the family consequences of migration, including marital strain, communication breakdown, uncertainty, childcare, and emotional vulnerability. Village-based initiatives such as Gembok Katresnan may be useful when symbolic commitment is connected to concrete support structures, including communication facilitation, family mediation, complaint services, psychosocial support, financial literacy, and empowerment for returnee migrants and family members. Symbolic and moral interventions are likely to be more defensible when they are embedded in accountable and accessible village services rather than standing alone as ceremonial acts.

At the same time, the argument must be read within clear limits. This is a single qualitative case study with a small number of participants, consisting of village officials, migrant workers, and family members. The data are strong enough to illuminate meanings, mechanisms, and local practices, but they are not sufficient to prove effectiveness or causal impact. Because the program is publicly endorsed by village authorities, the study may also contain institutional optimism bias. Future research should compare similar initiatives across migrant-sending regions, include more ambivalent and critical family voices, and examine possible tensions between support, surveillance, moral regulation, and family autonomy. These limitations clarify the proper scope of the argument: Gembok Katresnan is best understood as a locally embedded symbolic and institutional support mechanism for family resilience, not as a guaranteed solution to the complex vulnerabilities of migrant worker households.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how the Gembok Katresnan Program is experienced and institutionalized as a village-based support mechanism for family resilience among Indonesian migrant worker families in Bringinan Village, Ponorogo. The findings suggest that family resilience in this case is not sustained solely through private interpersonal adaptation. Rather, it is mediated through four interconnected processes: publicly witnessed marital commitment, communication and continuity of care across borders, village-based protective support across the migration cycle, and moral-religious meanings that help families interpret separation as a shared responsibility.



The study offers a case-based conceptual contribution to family resilience and transnational family scholarship. It shows that, in a migrant-sending village, resilience may be supported not only through intra-family coping, communication, and emotional adjustment, but also through public witnessing, local regulation, mediation, and community-based protection. The village appears as a meso-level actor that helps organize commitment, communication, and relational accountability across distance. However, the study does not claim that Gembok Katresnan directly prevents divorce or solves all vulnerabilities faced by migrant worker families. Its contribution is more modest: it illustrates how a locally embedded symbolic and institutional mechanism may help families make sense of migration-related separation and sustain responsibility across borders.

Practically, the findings suggest that village-based migrant worker protection should move beyond administrative documentation and economic reintegration. First, villages with high numbers of migrant workers could develop basic family counseling or referral services before departure, during placement, and after return. Such services may help couples discuss expectations, conflict management, childcare arrangements, financial planning, and emotional risks before migration occurs. Second, migrant worker family communication programs should be strengthened. These programs could include structured pre-departure family agreements, regular communication check-ins, digital communication guidance, and support for left-behind spouses, parents, and children. Third, local religious and community leaders may play a constructive role by providing moral guidance, family mediation, and psychosocial support, as long as their involvement strengthens family welfare without becoming coercive or blaming one party. In this way, symbolic commitment can be connected to concrete and accountable support services.

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