



RESILIENCE OF WIVES WHO ARE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (KDRT): A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAMIC PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the subjective experiences of wives who are victims of domestic violence (KDRT) in building psychological and spiritual resilience, to identify the internal and external factors shaping this resilience, and to analyze the role of Islamic values — patience (sabar), reliance on God (tawakal), effort (ikhtiar), and acceptance (ridha) — in the resilience-building process. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and non-participant observation with three female participants who had experienced or were experiencing domestic violence, and were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), following the stages of verbatim transcription, initial noting, development of emergent themes, and cross-case analysis. The findings identified four interrelated main themes: (1) multidimensional suffering and powerlessness; (2) emotional regulation and Islamic value-based coping strategies; (3) reinterpretation of the values of patience, reliance on God, effort, and acceptance; and (4) identity transformation from victim to empowered survivor. The completeness of these themes varied across participants, shaped by the duration of abuse, social support received, and the depth of spiritual meaning-making. Forgiveness toward the perpetrator also emerged as an important factor shaping the depth of resilience. This study concludes that, within the contextual and idiographic scope of these three cases, resilience among wives surviving domestic violence is not merely an ability to endure, but a transformative process integrating modern psychological resources with Islamic spiritual values — an understanding offered as a foundation for, rather than a general model of, more contextual Islamic counseling interventions for Muslim women who are victims of domestic violence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is both a social and a spiritual institution that occupies a central position in human life. From an Islamic perspective, marriage is not merely a social contract but an act of worship aimed at creating a life that is *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* — a household grounded in tranquility, affection, and mutual respect (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). Husband and wife are positioned as partners who jointly build a family that is healthy physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually (Al-Ghazali, 2004; Olson & DeFrain, 2014). However, the reality of married life does not always unfold according to this ideal concept. Domestic violence (Kekerasan Dalam Rumah Tangga, KDRT) is one form of deviation in the marital relationship that transforms a bond meant to be grounded in affection into a relationship full of pressure, domination, and physical, verbal, emotional, or economic mistreatment.



The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that approximately one in three women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner during her lifetime, with serious consequences for victims' psychological, emotional, and social health (World Health Organization, 2021). In Indonesia, the National Commission on Violence Against Women recorded 401,975 cases of violence against women throughout 2023, most of which occurred within the personal or domestic sphere (Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan, 2024). In Batam City, where this study was conducted, 44 cases of violence against women and children were recorded between January and February 2026 (Antara News, 2026). The psychological impact of domestic violence on victims is complex and multidimensional; prolonged violence can give rise to chronic anxiety, depression, psychological trauma, and even learned helplessness (Walker, 1979; Herman, 1997).

Not all women who experience domestic violence respond to this experience in the same way. In psychology, an individual's capacity to endure, adapt, and rise amid life's pressures is known as resilience — a dynamic capacity that enables individuals to achieve positive adjustment despite conditions full of risk (Masten, 2001), involving the ability to regulate emotion, withstand pressure, and build hope (Connor & Davidson, 2003). From the perspective of Islamic psychology, resilience is not only related to psychological strength but also to the quality of an individual's relationship with Allah SWT; psychological endurance is built through the internalization of the values of sabar (patience), tawakal (reliance on God), ikhtiar (effort), and ridha (acceptance), understood as spiritual strength for facing life's trials adaptively and constructively (Ancok & Suroso, 2011; Yusuf, 2018). To avoid these constructs being used interchangeably, this study distinguishes them conceptually: resilience refers to the overall dynamic capacity for positive adjustment amid adversity (Masten, 2001); coping refers to the concrete cognitive and behavioral strategies deployed moment-to-moment to manage the demands of a specific stressor (e.g., prayer, withdrawal, journaling); spiritual meaning-making refers to the interpretive process through which an experience of suffering is reframed within an Islamic worldview (e.g., understanding a trial as a test from Allah); and post-traumatic growth (PTG) refers to a positive psychological change that emerges as an outcome of struggling with trauma, extending beyond a return to baseline functioning. In the framework of this study, spiritual coping strategies and spiritual meaning-making are treated as processes that can contribute to resilience and, over a longer time horizon, to PTG, but the four are not treated as synonyms: a participant may draw on religious coping in a given moment without this amounting to resilience, and resilience in daily functioning does not by itself establish that post-traumatic growth has occurred.

Previous studies have widely confirmed the role of social support and spirituality in the resilience of domestic violence victims. Crann and Barata (2016) explain that resilience develops through changes in thinking, emotion management, and behavioral change that foster self-confidence and hope for the future. In Indonesia, Nurhayati and Fitriani (2021) found that domestic violence produces broad psychological impacts in the form of anxiety, depression, and loss of a sense of safety; Sari and Rahmawati (2022) identified social support, emotion regulation, and positive meaning-making as resilience factors; while Hasanah (2023) found that religious practice and the internalization of Islamic values function as an active source of psychological strength, reinforced by Aisyah and Maulana's (2024) finding that religiosity contributes significantly to psychological resilience through the strengthening of life meaning. Astuti and Bashori (2025) examined the semantic meaning of tawakal and found that it is an active spiritual attitude that integrates maximal effort with surrender to Allah, relevant as a source of resilience reinforcement. In line with this, Haryati et al. (2022) showed that Islamic counselors play an important role in addressing the spiritual dimension of domestic violence trauma survivors through accompaniment that emphasizes empowerment rather than legitimizing the violence. Kayanti et al. (2024) also found that social support contributes to post-traumatic growth in wives who are victims of domestic violence, with coping strategies acting as a mediator, while Golden et al. (2025) showed that domestic violence survivors' beliefs about forgiveness play an important role in recovery, even though forgiveness does not always mean reconciliation with the perpetrator.

Nevertheless, most previous studies have focused more on the negative impact of domestic violence than on the process of psychological adaptation and victims' resilience potential. Research integrating modern psychological perspectives with Islamic psychology to understand the resilience of domestic violence victims, particularly through a phenomenological exploration of subjective experience, remains very limited in the context of Muslim women in Indonesia. This gap forms the research problem of this study: how do wives who are victims of domestic violence subjectively experience the building of psychological and spiritual resilience, and how do internal factors, external factors, and the meaning-making of Islamic values play a role in the process of forming that resilience?

Based on this research problem, this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how wives who are victims of domestic violence make meaning of their life experience, build strategies for enduring, and develop psychological and spiritual resilience through the reinterpretation of Islamic values, while also identifying the internal and external factors that influence this process. This study is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of an Islamic resilience concept that integrates modern psychology with Islamic spiritual values, as well as a practical contribution as a foundation for developing more responsive and contextual Islamic counseling interventions for Muslim women who are victims of domestic violence, for psychology practitioners, family counselors, and religious community institutions alike.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, chosen because it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the meaning of lived experience as perceived and narrated directly by the individuals who experienced it (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2013). Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique with the following inclusion criteria: women who had experienced or were experiencing domestic violence, at least 21 years old, willing to participate voluntarily, and able to narrate their life experience openly and reflectively. The number of participants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, resulting in three participants: Mrs. MR (34 years old), who experienced physical and verbal abuse over 8 years of marriage and is now separated from her husband; Mrs. SF (29 years old), who experienced emotional and psychological abuse over 5 years of marriage and is in the process of divorce; and Mrs. HA (41 years old), who experienced physical, verbal, and economic abuse over 14 years of marriage, still legally married but living separately.

Data were collected through three techniques to support source triangulation: (1) semi-structured in-depth interviews, (2) non-participant observation to record participants' non-verbal expressions and emotional states during the interviews, and (3) documentation in the form of field notes. Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2009) through the stages of verbatim transcription, repeated reading, initial noting, the development of emergent themes, cross-case analysis, and the construction of interpretation from an Islamic psychology perspective. The credibility of the data was maintained through source triangulation, member checking, and researcher reflexivity. All three interviews were conducted face-to-face at locations chosen by the participants for privacy and comfort — the participant's home (Mrs. MR and Mrs. HA) and a café in Batam Centre (Mrs. SF) — each lasting 75–90 minutes and audio-recorded with consent. The researcher, a graduate-level psychology researcher without a personal history of domestic violence, occupied an insider position with respect to shared Islamic religious background but an outsider position with respect to participants' direct experience of abuse; this dual position was managed through reflexive journaling after each interview to document the researcher's own reactions and assumptions. Prior to each interview, the researcher engaged in bracketing by writing down her preconceptions about domestic violence, resilience, and Islamic coping so that these could be consciously set aside during data collection and analysis, consistent with the *epoché* procedure recommended in phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). Cross-case analysis was conducted by first completing within-case analysis for each participant (producing an individual table of emergent themes with supporting quotations), then systematically comparing these tables across the three cases to identify convergent themes (e.g., emotion regulation through Islamic practice, present in all three cases), divergent patterns (e.g., the aspect of the *sabar-tawakal-ikhtiar-ridha* reinterpretation that was most salient for each participant), and case-specific subthemes (e.g., social isolation and shame, salient only for Mrs. MR), which were then synthesized into the four main themes reported below. This study obtained participant consent through informed consent, guaranteed the confidentiality of participant identities through the use of initials, and obtained supervisor approval prior to data collection. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian; verbatim excerpts presented in the Results section were translated into English by the researcher, with meaning-preserving rather than literal translation prioritized for idiomatic and religious expressions.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Participants

Initial	Age	Length of Marriage	Type of KDRT	Marital Status	Occupation
Mrs. MR	34 years	8 years	Physical and verbal	Separated from husband	Small trader
Mrs. SF	29 years	5 years	Emotional and psychological	In the process of divorce	Housewife
Mrs. HA	41 years	14 years	Physical, verbal, and economic	Married, living separately	Private employee

Source: Primary research data, processed from in-depth interviews with three participants.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis of the three participants' experiences identified four interrelated main themes in the resilience process: (1) multidimensional suffering and powerlessness; (2) emotion regulation and Islamic value-based coping strategies; (3) reinterpretation of the values of sabar, tawakal, ikhtiar, and ridha; and (4) identity transformation from victim to empowered survivor. The completeness and pattern in which these four themes emerged differed across participants.

Multidimensional Suffering and Powerlessness

All three participants experienced multidimensional effects of domestic violence, touching physical, psychological, social, and/or economic dimensions — consistent with the clinical picture of prolonged trauma described by Walker (1979) and Herman (1997), as well as Nurhayati and Fitriani's (2021) findings in the Indonesian context. Mrs. MR, who experienced physical and verbal abuse, described a state of hypervigilance and chronic anxiety triggered even by something as small as the sound of a door key: "I became afraid to speak, always anxious whenever I heard the sound of the door key being opened... my heart would race, and I couldn't sleep soundly because of nightmares" (MR, 34 years old). This hypervigilance culminated in a peak moment of powerlessness: "the moment I felt most powerless was when I was pregnant with my second child — I was hit but could not run away because I was worried about the baby" (MR). Mrs. MR's suffering was compounded by social isolation and shame, as she expressed being confused about whom to tell because she felt ashamed of her household situation — a subtheme not explicitly verbalized by the other two participants, but still relevant as part of the broader context of social stigma faced by domestic violence victims.

Mrs. SF experienced a different pattern of suffering, namely a cognitive erosion in the form of learned helplessness that developed gradually as a result of prolonged emotional and manipulative pressure: "I lost all my self-confidence. I felt worthless. The hardest part was when I began to believe that all my husband's accusations were true — I felt I really was stupid, useless, and unable to live without him. That was a very dark phase of learned helplessness" (SF, 29 years old) — a pattern consistent with the concept of learned helplessness put forward by Seligman, in which victims lose the belief that their actions can change their situation. Mrs. HA, meanwhile, experienced the most multidimensional suffering among the three participants, encompassing physical, psychological, and economic effects simultaneously as a result of her husband's tight financial control accompanied by physical violence whenever she questioned it: "What left the deepest mark was the feeling of not being valued as a human being... I felt I was living in constant fear" (HA, 41 years old). Mrs. HA described her condition as one of constant fear, accompanied by severe anxiety and sleep disturbance, yet she still displayed a high capacity for self-reflection from the very beginning of the interview process.

Emotion Regulation and Islamic Value-Based Coping Strategies

All three participants consistently used Islamic spiritual practices — prayer, dzikir, or istighfar — as a primary mechanism for emotion regulation, positioning spirituality as an active psychological resource rather than mere passive escape. Mrs. MR explained that her strategy was to withdraw first from whatever triggered her partner's anger in order to calm herself, then to perform night prayers while crying and pouring her heart out to Allah: "I learned to stay quiet first, to step away from whatever triggered my husband's anger, so I could calm myself. Once I was calmer, I would pray at night and cry,

pouring my heart out to Allah — the only place where I felt heard without being judged” (MR). This combination of behavioral de-escalation with qiyamullail reflects an integration of psychological and spiritual emotion regulation, in which the transcendent relationship with Allah functions as a source of safe emotional support.

Mrs. SF adapted her coping strategy by adding a practice of reflective journaling as a form of self-validation, alongside the dzikir and prayer she used to strengthen herself inwardly when choosing to stay silent and withdraw emotionally from her partner’s insults: “I learned not to react immediately to my husband’s insults. I chose to stay quiet and withdraw emotionally, while strengthening myself inwardly through dzikir and prayer... I also started writing a journal to validate my own feelings — that I was not crazy and not wrong” (SF). This journaling functioned as a cognitive reframing tool that helped Mrs. SF rebuild a more accurate self-narrative, one more resistant to the psychological manipulation she experienced. Mrs. HA, meanwhile, displayed the most structured emotion-regulation approach: “I learned to recognize my emotions before reacting. When I felt angry, I would say *istighfar*, take a deep breath, and only then speak” (HA) — a pattern she grounded in the theological conviction that Allah will not give a servant a trial beyond what they can bear (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 286). Mrs. HA also complemented her spiritual strategy with integrated professional counseling. These findings reinforce the view of Ancok and Suroso (2011) and Astuti and Bashori (2025) that Islamic spiritual values, when actively interpreted, function as a source of strength that drives positive change rather than a legitimization of accepting violence. The role of Islamic counselors in accompanying this process is also consistent with the findings of Haryati et al. (2022), who emphasize the importance of spiritual accompaniment oriented toward empowerment rather than justification of the violence experienced.

Reinterpretation of the Values of Sabar, Tawakal, Ikhtiar, and Ridha

This theme is the key conceptual turning point that transforms the meaning of suffering, emerging fully in Mrs. MR and Mrs. HA and, in a follow-up interview, also captured explicitly for Mrs. SF. Mrs. MR recounted that she used to misunderstand sabar: “I used to misunderstand sabar as just staying silent and accepting the beatings and insults to preserve the household. Now I understand that sabar does not mean surrendering to being hurt. Sabar means restraining myself from repaying evil with evil, while still trying to protect myself and find the right way out” (MR). She also translated tawakal and ikhtiar into concrete steps — beginning economic independence through a small business, strengthening family support, and legally arranging her separation — and understood ridha as acceptance of the trial from Allah without condoning the injustice she experienced: “Ridha does not mean accepting violence as a fate to be enjoyed. For me, ridha means accepting that what happened was a trial from Allah, then taking the lesson from it... I am ridha with the process, not with the wrongdoing” (MR).

Mrs. HA showed the most explicit reinterpretation by firmly stating that “sabar means staying strong while doing what is necessary to protect myself — not surrendering to being hit. Sabar is active, not passive. I am sabar in holding back my anger so as not to repay violence with violence, but I am not sabar about letting myself keep being hurt” (HA) — a dichotomy between sabar as restraining one’s anger (constructive) and rejecting the passivity that allows oneself to keep being hurt (destructive). Her ikhtiar included the professional dimension of seeking help from a psychologist and legal counsel, strengthening her economic independence, and deciding to live separately, while she understood ridha as accepting Allah’s decree without losing the spirit to improve her life: “Ridha means accepting Allah’s decree without losing the spirit to improve my life. I am ridha that this was my trial, but I am not ridha with my husband’s injustice” (HA) — a psychological state that allowed her to think clearly without becoming trapped in resentment. Mrs. SF, in a follow-up interview, articulated all three constructs with similar clarity. On sabar: “Sabar for me now doesn’t mean staying silent while being oppressed. Sabar is staying calm in the face of provocation while looking for the best way out” (SF). On tawakal: “Tawakal is the belief that Allah will not abandon a servant who makes an effort. I make the effort, then I hand the outcome over to Allah” (SF). On ridha: “Ridha makes me stop blaming the past or myself. I accept that this is part of my life’s journey to becoming a stronger, wiser woman” (SF). This shift in the meaning of sabar from passive to active is consistent with Ancok and Suroso’s (2011) assertion that Islamic values should function as an active force, and with Astuti and Bashori’s (2025) semantic study showing that tawakal conceptually integrates maximal effort (ikhtiar) with surrender to Allah, rather than passive resignation without effort. That this fuller reinterpretation emerged for Mrs. SF only in a follow-up interview shows that the process of spiritual meaning-making is individual and does not always unfold linearly or within a single sitting, consistent with the view of resilience as a dynamic process (Richardson, 2002).

Identity Transformation: From Victim to Empowered Survivor

All three participants showed movement in the same direction, from a passive victim position toward a more empowered survivor, though at different stages. Mrs. MR articulated her transformation through the concrete recovery of self-agency: at 34 years old, she now sells small snacks at home while raising her two children, describing her life now as calmer: “Now I sell small snacks at home while raising my two children. My life now is calmer, even though I have to manage my expenses more strictly for economic reasons” (MR). The calm she now feels — even amid economic challenges — reflects a significant improvement in quality of life, with economic independence as a concrete expression of her restored agency.

For Mrs. SF, the turning point in her transformation was triggered by firm external validation from her older sister, who affirmed that what she experienced was psychological abuse and that she was being manipulated, not because she was foolish: “She saw the change in me and said firmly, ‘This is psychological violence, SF. You are not stupid — you are being manipulated.’ Those words opened my eyes” (SF). This accurate labeling of her experience helped Mrs. SF carry out an essential cognitive reframing — “I no longer feel stupid, because I know my rights” (SF) — and played a crucial role in breaking the cycle of learned helplessness that had previously bound her. Mrs. HA, meanwhile — who now works as a private employee and is active in a religious study community — reached the most mature stage of transformation, marked by an altruistic aspiration to one day become a volunteer or companion for other women experiencing the same thing: “Perhaps one day I could become a volunteer or a companion for other women going through the same thing, so they don’t feel alone” (HA). This aspiration marks a shift from recipient of help to giver of help, which from the perspective of Islamic psychology represents a meaningful form of self-actualization.

This variation in the pathways of transformation is consistent with Reivich and Shatté (2002), who emphasize the importance of personal and interpersonal resources in resilience, and reinforces the findings of Sari and Rahmawati (2022) and Aisyah and Maulana (2024) that social support and religiosity play a significant role in the psychological resilience of women who are victims of domestic violence. The process of forgiving the perpetrator also emerged as a factor influencing the depth of resilience; the still-partial resilience seen in Mrs. SF is related to an unresolved process of forgiveness, consistent with the finding of Golden et al. (2025) that domestic violence victims’ beliefs about forgiveness — which does not always mean reconciliation with the perpetrator — play an important role in psychological recovery, and with Kayanti et al.’s (2024) finding that coping strategies mediate the relationship between social support and post-traumatic growth in wives who are victims of domestic violence.

Non-Verbal Observation Findings

Non-participant observation during the interviews provided complementary data that enriched and contextualized the three participants’ verbal narratives. Mrs. MR initially took long breaths and appeared tense when discussing her trauma, but showed an increasingly steady posture as the interview progressed, appearing much more relaxed with a sincere smile by the end of the session. Mrs. SF initially appeared nervous, kept her head down, and spoke softly, but became increasingly open and spoke in a louder voice over time — a change that closed with the symbolic gesture of paying for her own coffee as an expression of newfound independence. Mrs. HA, who appeared calm and reflective from the very beginning, smiled more frequently while discussing her recovery process, maintaining an upright posture and walking the researcher out with her head held high at the end of the session. Overall, the non-verbal movement of all three participants from initial tension toward openness was consistent with, and thus lent contextual support to, the trajectories of change described in their verbal accounts. This consistency is reported as corroborating context rather than as proof of the narratives’ factual accuracy: non-verbal behavior can reflect genuine affect, but it cannot verify the truth of a spoken account, and it remains equally compatible with participants simply feeling more at ease as rapport with the researcher grew over the course of the interview.

Cross-Case Synthesis

Overall, the essence of the phenomenon found in this study shows that suffering caused by domestic violence does not necessarily lead to permanent psychological collapse. All three participants experienced real trauma, yet were gradually able to endure and adapt through a combination of behavioral and spiritual coping strategies, at different speeds and levels of completeness. The key turning point is a shift in the meaning of core Islamic psychological values, from a passive to an active and empowering understanding. The resilience of these three wives who are victims of domestic violence can thus be understood, within the scope of this idiographic study, as a transformative process that is

individual in its speed and pathway, sustained by the interaction between internal factors (emotion regulation, religiosity, meaning-making), external factors (family support, religious community, professional counseling), and the reinterpretation of Islamic spiritual values as a bridge between suffering and recovery — yet converging toward the same direction, namely the formation of a survivor identity capable of making meaning of suffering without legitimizing the violence experienced.

This study has limitations that must be considered in interpreting its findings, including the limited number of participants (three), meaning the findings are contextual and idiographic rather than statistically representative (Moustakas, 1994; Smith et al., 2009); the retrospective nature of the data, which may be subject to recall bias; theme interpretation that relied on a single researcher without inter-researcher triangulation; a single, cross-sectional interview design; and a research scope limited to participants residing in Batam City.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the idiographic depth of these three cases, this study offers a contextual understanding — rather than a generalizable model for all Muslim women who are victims of domestic violence — that the resilience of wives who are victims of domestic violence, from the perspective of Islamic psychology, is formed through four interrelated themes: multidimensional suffering and powerlessness, emotion regulation and Islamic value-based coping strategies, the active reinterpretation of *sabar*, *tawakal*, *ikhthiar*, and *ridha*, and identity transformation from victim to empowered survivor. Resilience is not a binary condition (succeed or fail) but rather a spectrum of individual processes, in which forgiveness acts as an important catalyst toward a more complete experience of resilience, and Islamic spiritual values function as an active strength — not a legitimization of accepting violence — in victims' psychological recovery process.

Practically, these findings recommend that psychology practitioners and clinical counselors integrate the spiritual dimension into assessment and intervention for Muslim clients who are victims of domestic violence, for example through counseling modules that integrate forgiveness therapy with a trauma-based approach. Family counselors are advised to provide a space for reflective dialogue that helps clients distinguish between *ridha* toward Allah's trial and *ridha* toward human injustice, and to involve close family members as a source of external validation. Religious community institutions, including religious study groups, are advised to develop accompaniment programs that combine social support and spiritual strengthening for women who are victims of domestic violence, including involving survivors as peer companions. Future research is advised to employ broader source and method triangulation, longitudinal designs to capture the dynamics of resilience over time, more diverse participants in terms of age, socioeconomic background, and geographic region, and the involvement of more than one researcher in the coding process to improve the credibility of theme categorization.

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