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INTEGRATION OF SABR AND GRIT IN LONG-TERM MARRIAGE

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Abstract

This study explores how the integration of the spiritual value of patience (sabr) and psychological perseverance (grit) sustains relational stability in couples within long-term marriages. Employing a qualitative approach through a constructivist lens, an in-depth single-case study was conducted on a married couple married for three decades (30 years) who successfully navigated structural crises ranging from a unilateral career transition to degenerative health challenges. Rather than relying on surface-level compatibility, the findings suggest an initial interpretive model of long-term marital resilience driven by a structured cognitive-spiritual construction. Specifically, the couple's resilience is built upon premarital theological inoculation via Mitsaqon Ghalizha (early cognitive preparation viewing marriage as a sacred covenant of sustained worship), systemic ego deferral (conscious management of personality and cultural differences by setting aside pride), active-offensive sabr coupled with theological reframing (transforming physical suffering into a shared growth curriculum rather than passive resignation), and marital detachment (releasing absolute ownership to view the spouse as a divine trust). Ultimately, this study illustrates how the integration of personal grit and transcendental resilience offers an initial interpretive framework to nurture intimacy and psychosocial adaptation in the second half of the marital life cycle.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Maintaining the integrity of a marital relationship over a long period, particularly up to three decades or the silver anniversary phase, is neither a linear nor a conflict-free process (Ezadany, 2026). Throughout the family life cycle, married couples are almost always confronted with various structural crises that demand high adaptability, ranging from macroeconomic fluctuations and radical career transitions to the decline of physical health in middle age (Akbar et al., 2024).

Marriage in an Islamic perspective is interpreted as mitsaqan ghaliza (a sacred and strong covenant) positioned as sustained worship (Ainun & Sunuwati, 2023). This demands more than mere momentary recovery capacity or reactive resilience; rather, it requires continuous and sustained perseverance to achieve shared future goals (Hasanah & Wahyuningrum, 2024; Zubaidah & Zahiri, 2016).

However, contemporary marital dynamics are often faced with a complex spectrum of difficulties, where destructive threats stem not only from sudden acute crises, but also from the accumulation of monotonous, non-crisis burnout within daily routines (Li et al., 2018; Ain et al., 2021). When such chronic burnout intersects with external shocks, couples are required to possess

extraordinary adaptive capacity to maintain relational integrity (Kitthavorn et al., 2024; Jeon et al., 2025).

In modern psychological literature, this consistent and sustained effort is highlighted through the concept of grit, defined as the integration of perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth, 2016). Although global studies demonstrate the predictive validity of grit regarding marital retention and quality of life, its application to Muslim populations faces clear philosophical and conceptual limitations (Fernández-Martín et al., 2020; Bannon et al., 2025; Carberry & Fortune, 2025; Duckworth, 2016).

Specifically, the research gap lies in the fact that as a construct rooted in self-driven achievement motivation and secular intrapersonal regulation, pure grit fails to explain how spiritual values, particularly the transcendental strength relied upon by Muslim couples, integrate to sustain long-term marital stability (Luthans et al., 2018).

On the other hand, studies on marital resilience frequently stop at quantitative measurements or view relational resilience merely as a standalone psychological variable (Hidayat et al., 2024). Such approaches often overlook deeper cognitive-spiritual dimensions, specifically how couples actively assign meaning to suffering, crises, and domestic dynamics through their belief systems. In the context of Indonesian society, relational resilience is closely tied to the spiritual value of patience (sabr).

Grounded in Islamic psychological literature, sabr is not understood as a passive form of resignation or naive surrender, but as an active, strategic, and theologically enriched form of self-regulation (Rustianti & Silvianetri, 2025). This specific gap highlights the need for an in-depth exploration of how the spiritual value of sabr intersects and integrates with the psychological construct of grit in sustaining long-term marital stability. Contrary to the common view that attributes relationship longevity to surface compatibility, this study, through a constructivist lens, views strong marriages as built through a deliberate cognitive reconstruction process.

The integration of psychological perseverance and spiritual orientation serves as the primary axis in mitigating conflict and managing structural shocks across the marital life cycle (Alfain, Soleh & Yamani, 2023). Therefore, this article aims to explore how a married couple with a 30-year marriage duration integrates grit and active-offensive sabr in navigating structural crises. Through a constructivist single-case study, the resulting insights are positioned as an initial interpretive model, rather than a universal generalization, designed to offer a new theoretical contribution regarding a faith-based psychosocial adaptation model that effectively nurtures intimacy and relational resilience in the second half of the life cycle.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a constructivist case study design to capture the subjective reality and deep meaning of the participants' relational experiences (Hattiangadi & Jadhav, 2026). The constructivist approach was selected because it positions the researcher and participants as co-creators in building an understanding of how psychological and spiritual realities are experienced, rather than merely objectively measured (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995).

The primary focus of the investigation is directed toward exploring the cognitive processes, dyadic strategies, and articulation of transcendental values that sustain long-term marital resilience. The participants in this in-depth single case study are a married couple, HK (58 years old), coded as (P/H) [Participant/Husband], and YN (54 years old), coded as (P/W) [Participant/Wife], who have built a marital relationship for three decades (30 years) or entered the silver marriage phase. Participant selection was conducted purposively based on criteria including long marriage duration (Zapanta-Ribu & Ribu, 2025), a history of successfully navigating severe structural crises (such as macro career transitions and degenerative health challenges) (Beeris et al., 2025; Samadi et al., 2021), and a willingness to engage in deep self-reflection.

Primary data collection was conducted on Sunday, May 24, 2026, in Bandung, through semi-structured in-depth interviews and observation of dyadic interactions (Fadila et al., 2025). Data Analysis and Transparency of Conceptual Coding: The data analysis procedure follows the qualitative thematic analysis framework with a constructivist orientation, comprising stages of initial coding, focused coding, and axial/thematic synthesis.

To ensure clear traceability between raw data, codes, and final themes, the coding process was executed iteratively: a.) Initial Coding: Transcripts were examined line-by-line to identify raw expressions regarding vow alignments, coping strategies during career changes, and handling health

shocks. b.) Focused Coding: Related codes were clustered to group expressions such as conscious yielding of control, spiritual reframing of illnesses, and viewing partners as trusts. c.) Axial Synthesis (Emergence of Novel Concepts): Through interpretive co-construction, specific patterns were synthesized into conceptual terms. For instance, data reflecting the husband's conscious accommodation of his wife's assertiveness was coded and abstracted into Systemic Ego Deferral, while responses combining medical efforts with spiritual surrender during a stroke were synthesized into Active-Offensive Sabr and Theological Reframing.

All interview transcript narratives were iteratively analyzed to trace these cognitive patterns, dyadic coping mechanisms, and the transcendence of meaning underlying the participants' grit and sabr resilience. To maintain trustworthiness, this study implemented data source triangulation techniques (through cross-verification of narratives between husband and wife) as well as member checking to ensure that the developed interpretations accurately reflect the essence of the participants' subjective experiences. Methodological Boundary: Because this design relies on an in-depth single case study, the findings are positioned strictly as an initial interpretive model rather than a basis for broad statistical generalization.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The participants are a married couple who have navigated 30 years of marriage. The track record of this couple's relational journey is marked by the complexity of socio-psychological dynamics, ranging from cultural background differences (Sundanese and Palembang-Bangka), sharp personality contrasts, career transitions and financial shocks in mature adulthood, to a health crisis in the form of a stroke suffered by the husband.

Note on Personality Assessment: The characterization of personality types as “Phlegmatic–Choleric” is derived from the participants' qualitative self-reflection and behavioral descriptions during the in-depth interviews, rather than formal psychometric testing.

An in-depth analysis of the empirical data from this couple reveals that relational resilience and consistency of interest (marital grit) in their long-term marriage do not rely on the absence of conflict or surface-level compatibility. On the contrary, stability and harmony are achieved through deliberate meaning-making amidst structural shocks, which are tightly integrated between cognitive-spiritual regulation and dyadic adaptation skills.

The dynamics of the participants' resilience and relational meaning-making are comprehensively divided into the following four main thematic discussions:

Premarital Cognitive Inoculation and the Theological Essence of Mitsaqon Ghalizha

The foundational mental preparation established prior to the solemnization of vows (akad). Psychological Meaning & Spiritual Dimension: P/H did not reduce the essence of marriage to a mere ceremonial celebration, but rather viewed it as mitsaqon ghalizha, a firm and sacred covenant before God. This theological vision serves as an internal locus of control that shields them from neurotic expectations. By positioning marriage as sustained worship, the couple developed a long-term mental readiness to tolerate personality differences right from the beginning of dyadic alignment. This is reflected in P/H's statement:

"In Islam, it is called Mitsaqon Ghalizha, a strong covenant made to Allah. It is the longest act of worship... [We often] forget to mentally prepare for the longest worship. Understanding the true essence of marriage ensures that your spouse is not seen as a burden when they become helpless." (P/H)

This theological meaning-making acts as a psychological anchor that maintains commitment intact across various life crisis phases, while preventing partners from viewing one another as a burden during functional decline.

Personality Polarization, Systemic Ego Deferral, and Psychological Safety

Managing sharp personality contrasts, specifically the husband's calm disposition and the wife's assertive style, along with cultural differences (Sundanese and Palembang-Bangka). Psychological Meaning & Spiritual Dimension: Rather than triggering conflict, this socio-psychological polarization is managed through Systemic Ego Deferral. The husband consciously grants broad domestic and social autonomy to the wife, viewing her sharpness of thought as an instrumental asset that complements his weaknesses:

"My wife is also socially active... I give her the freedom and opportunity to create outside, as long as communication is maintained... Because my wife is a choleric type, whereas I am phlegmatic. For things that require firmness, she is sharper. So her support is very important to me." (P/H)

This stability reduces tension because it is backed by the establishment of psychological safety at home. The domestic sphere functions as a total decompression space where social boundaries and cultural differences can be set aside. This is reinforced by a mutual willingness to apologize (open-mindedness):

"...we maintain stability by striving to be open-minded... so when internal issues arise, there is no hesitation to apologize to each other, regardless of who is at fault." (P/W)

Dyadic Coping Amidst Financial Crises, Health Issues, and Career Transitions

Navigating structural shocks, notably when P/H made a unilateral decision at the age of 38 to leave his corporate career and transition into freelancing. Psychological Meaning & Spiritual Dimension: Instead of triggering destructive regulatory conflict, P/W responded through mature dyadic coping, balancing material fluctuations through the stability of her position as a Civil Servant Teacher/School Principal. Extended family support and daily micro-rituals reinforced this adjustment:

"I resigned at age 38, and I went to my father-in-law to inform him of my resignation. At that time, he gave me motivation... Allah will surely provide sustenance. I became even more convinced that this decision would not bring hardship to his daughter (my wife)." (P/H)

"A marriage remains stable if both extended families reinforce each other... That way, no side exacerbates the situation." (P/W)

"Patience (sabr) means caring and understanding... Sabr is not just words, but actions." (P/H)

Autonomy support from the husband and the cultivation of intimacy through daily micro-rituals, such as "arranging coffee dates for two", have proven effective in mitigating emotional burnout and maintaining authentic warmth after more than three decades together:

"We like to make use of small moments, like agreeing to grab coffee together at a cafe after work, depending on our budget. That is our way of nurturing the relationship amidst our busy routines." (P/W)

Theological Reframing, Active-Offensive Sabr, and Marital Detachment

Facing severe health shocks when the husband suffered a stroke. Psychological Meaning & Spiritual Dimension: Rather than succumbing to passive fatalism, the couple practiced Active-Offensive Sabr, blending maximum horizontal medical efforts with vertical spiritual surrender. Through the mechanism of Theological Reframing, the trial of declining health was reconstructed as a "remedial curriculum" designed to elevate their level of marital maturity:

"Sabr is neither silence nor passive resignation. For instance, when my husband suffered a stroke recently, I didn't just passively surrender; I put forth maximum effort... I viewed that trial as a 'remedial course' to move up a grade. We believed that illness was not the end, but a mental test." (P/W)

This maturity is further refined by the principle of Marital Detachment, in which they relinquish the illusion of absolute ownership over one another and view their partner as a divine trust (titipan Ilahi). This existential awareness eliminates perfectionistic expectations, fosters unconditional caregiving, and brings deep gratitude when observing their spouse in the mature stage of life:

"When she sleeps. I love looking at her face when she sleeps, feeling peaceful and grateful (to have her)." (P/H)

By realizing that the spouse belongs to God, perfectionistic expectations are dissolved, turning past crises into collective harmony in the second half of the life cycle:

"Align your intentions. Instill within yourself that your spouse does not belong to you, but is a trust from Allah. So do not set unrealistically high expectations. When we realize our spouse belongs to Allah, we become more peaceful and easygoing in navigating life together." (P/W)

Discussion

The findings from this couple's case study provide an important theoretical contribution to expanding the lens of contemporary family psychology literature regarding long-term marriage dynamics. Traditionally, psychological constructs such as grit (perseverance and passion for long-term goals) and relational resilience (dyadic coping) are often examined through a secular framework centered on self-driven intrapersonal capacity (Fernández-Martín et al., 2020; Bannon et al., 2025; Carberry & Fortune, 2025; Duckworth, 2016). However, empirical data from participants P/H and P/W

demonstrate that in couples with a three-decade marriage duration (silver phase), relational resilience is no longer driven solely by ego or personal achievement, but by a radical integration between modern psychological self-regulation and spiritual transcendence (Kurnia et al., 2021; Samadi et al., 2021).

First, the findings suggest that grit in marriage is not static; rather, it evolves through what is termed Premarital Theological Inoculation and the theological meaning of mitsaqon ghalizha. While general literature views grit as an innate trait or a product of a secular social environment, this study illustrates that a cognitive map formed prior to vows, positioning marriage as sustained worship, serves as a highly resilient internal locus of control (Ainun & Sunuwati, 2023; Zapanta-Ribu & Ribu, 2025). This theological vision reduces perfectionistic expectations and builds preventive resilience before structural crises emerge within the household. This aligns with findings by Zapanta-Ribu and Ribu (2025), who emphasize that marital commitment grounded in sacred dimensions and traditional values is a primary key to sustaining marriage past 25 years.

Second, regarding the novelty of the conceptual constructs developed in this study (Active-Offensive Sabr, Theological Reframing, and Marital Detachment), these terms are built directly from the grounded empirical data of the participants as interpretive constructs rather than mere adaptations of prior static theories. Grounded in Islamic psychological literature, sabr is established here as a dynamic self-regulation mechanism that holds equal theoretical weight to Western grit constructs (Nasrin, 2025). The articulation of Active-Offensive Sabr extends traditional coping frameworks (which often limit chronic illness management to passive resignation or standard problem/emotion-focused coping) by demonstrating how vertical spiritual surrender synergizes aggressively with maximum horizontal medical efforts (Lestari & Azzahro, 2026; Nasrin, 2025). By reframing severe trials as a "remedial curriculum to move up a grade," the couple transforms physical suffering into a catalyst for relational growth. This is completed through the concept of marital detachment, where interpreting one's spouse as a "divine trust (titipan Ilahi)" eliminates burnout and fosters unconditional caregiving, supporting Kurnia et al. (2021), who show that peak marital satisfaction stems from gratitude, patience (sabr), and surrender (tafakur).

Third, the dynamics of conflict management among the participants challenge the classic assumption that marital harmony requires surface-level psychological compatibility. Instead, the data show that extreme personality polarization (such as Choleric and Phlegmatic, based on participant self-reflection) becomes a source of managerial strength when processed through Systemic Ego Deferral and complementary appreciation. The husband consciously releases defensiveness to validate his wife's firmness as an adaptive instrument. Complementary role division and the provision of psychological safety at home reduce tension, allowing the domestic sphere to function as a total decompression space to remove social masks. This synthesis also succeeds in mitigating potential conflict arising from differing cultural backgrounds (Sundanese and Palembang-Bangka), reinforcing research by Ezadany (2026), who observed that among senior couples married for over 30 years, conflict resolution styles shift toward compromise, accommodation, and collaboration rooted in patience (sabr) and mature emotional regulation. Furthermore, achieving two-way relational harmony aligns with the framework of perceived fairness in romantic relationships, emphasizing mutuality and self-awareness (Permana & Putri, 2024).

The experience of managing financial crises during career transitions and navigating cross-family relationships also confirms the findings of Permana and Aliyyatussa'adah (2024), where the involvement and positive management of extended families/in-laws prevent power dynamics disintegration and preserve emotional stability. Moreover, Samadi et al. (2021) highlight that long-term marital resilience is strongly influenced by the ability to mutually support one another through health crises and physical functional changes.

Methodologically, because this study utilizes an in-depth constructivist single-case study design, these theoretical insights are positioned as an initial interpretive model rather than universal laws (Hattiangadi & Jadhav, 2026; Stake, 1995). Long-term marriage is thus revealed not as the result of an absence of problems, but as the fruit of a joint capacity to transform structural crises into a sacred space for nurturing intimacy, maturity, and endless devotion.

4. CONCLUSION

Relational resilience in long-term marriage does not rely on the absence of problems or mere surface-level compatibility, but rather on the couple's capacity to integrate psychological perseverance (grit) with spiritual transcendence (sabr). Based on an in-depth constructivist single-case study of a

couple with a three-decade marriage duration, robust stability and intimacy are achieved through a series of structured adaptation mechanisms: ranging from premarital theological inoculation based on mitsaqon ghalizha, systemic ego deferral, management of financial and health crises through active-offensive sabr, to theological reframing and marital detachment that view life trials as a shared growth curriculum. Because this study relies on a single case, these findings are positioned as an initial interpretive model illustrating how religious values and modern psychological self-regulation work synergistically.

Future research is encouraged to broaden this exploration by involving a wider and more varied group of participants to observe the dynamics of grit and sabr articulation across more diverse cultural and faith backgrounds. Furthermore, to ensure that these empirical insights provide practical value without over-claiming absolute causality beyond a single case, family guidance institutions, premarital course organizers, and marriage counselors are advised to expand training curricula beyond surface skills, such as basic communication or conflict management, to include training on long-term cognitive maps, spiritual meaning (mitsaqon ghalizha), and mental simulations for mature-age structural crises.

Similarly, couples navigating the second half of marriage can draw insights from the frameworks of active-offensive sabr, theological reframing, and marital detachment; rather than viewing personality differences or health decline as breakdown threats, couples are encouraged to practice systemic ego deferral, habituate setting aside pride to apologize, and manage autonomous space and micro-intimacy to prevent relational burnout. Subsequent empirical explorations should continue to examine how variations in other belief systems articulate forms of grit and transcendental resilience in long-term marital dynamics.

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