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STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING HOUSEHOLD HARMONY IN THE CONTEXT OF LIVING WITH THE IN-LAWS IN MAMA IRA'S FAMILY

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Abstract

Multigenerational living arrangements, particularly co-residence with in-laws, are prevalent in rural Indonesia, driven by filial piety, economic considerations, and the need for elder care amid ongoing urbanization; however, empirically grounded analyses of culturally attuned mechanisms that sustain household harmony in such settings remain limited. This study examines strategies for maintaining household harmony in a multigenerational co-residence through the case of Mama Ira's family in Dusun Jati Gabahan, with a specific focus on how religious values such as *birrul walidain* are integrated into everyday family dynamics. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation from three purposively selected informants (Mama Ira, her husband, and her in-laws), and analyzed thematically with source triangulation to ensure validity. The findings indicate that voluntary co-residence is primarily motivated by moral responsibility and emotional support, and is sustained by flexible division of roles—where in-laws contribute through trading and childcare while the nuclear family manages

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domestic tasks—alongside clear financial boundaries, open communication, and spousal consultation in resolving conflicts. Religious practices, including mutual reminders for prayer and shared Quranic study, reinforce harmony through the internalization of *sabr* (patience) and *tasamuh* (tolerance), while parental authority (*aulawiyah*) serves to balance differences in childrearing approaches. These dynamics collectively exemplify *keluarga sakinah*, fostering spiritual cohesion and minimizing resentment, and offer contextually grounded insights for family scholars and policymakers seeking to promote intergenerational solidarity through equitable role arrangements, communicative boundaries, and faith-based resilience in collectivist societies.

Keywords: Multigenerational Living; In-Law Co-Residence; Family Communication; Islamic Family Values; Rural Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Multigenerational living arrangements, in which adult children live with their in-laws, have become increasingly common worldwide, particularly in collectivist societies such as Indonesia. Families often choose this setup to fulfill filial responsibilities and provide care for aging members (Rossalia & Priadi, 2018). Such arrangements offer emotional support and economic stability but can also introduce interpersonal challenges.

In the Indonesian context, rural communities exemplify this trend. For instance, in Dusun Jati Gabahan, households frequently co-reside with in-laws due to parental caregiving needs and family economic stability, rather than coercion (Sidiqoh & Ashari, 2023). It reflects deeper cultural norms prioritizing intergenerational solidarity amid urbanization and financial pressures.

A poignant case is that of Mama Ira, who lived with her in-laws for eight years to combat their loneliness and meet daily needs. Her experience highlights voluntary commitment to elder care, mirroring patterns in similar Southeast Asian settings where such choices strengthen family bonds without resentment.

Central to harmonious co-residence is a flexible and equitable division of roles. In Mama Ira's household, in-laws contributed through small-scale trading and childcare, while she and her husband managed domestic chores. This balance echoes findings from Balikpapan Timur, where fair task-sharing and open communication reduced conflicts and bolstered family ties (Altafiah et al., 2024).

Privacy and clear boundaries remain critical, especially in financial matters. Mama Ira noted that her in-laws refrained from interfering in the nuclear family's finances, preserving autonomy and averting disputes. Research indicates that explicit financial boundaries enhance relationships between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law (Hasyim & Hidayah, 2019).

Effective communication fosters mutual respect and openness. Mama Ira maintained positive dialogues with her husband and in-laws, avoiding negativity and emphasizing appreciation. Studies confirm that warm, effective communication mitigates conflicts and promotes relational harmony in extended families (Fatinah et al., 2025).

Conflict resolution further sustains coexistence. When disagreements arose, Mama Ira consulted her husband privately before joint discussions with in-laws, prioritizing deliberation and patience. It aligns with effective conflict-resolution models in multigenerational Indonesian households (Haryati, 2017) and draws on *musyawarah* (consensus-building) traditions.

Religious and cultural values amplify harmony in such arrangements. Co-residence intensified shared practices such as congregational prayers, prayer reminders, and Quranic study, aligning with *Birrul Walidain* (filial piety) principles that emphasize respect and endurance (Umami & Ichsan, 2024). These elements cultivate a spiritually enriched home environment. Despite these strengths, gaps persist in understanding how religious values and conflict strategies sustain long-term harmony in Indonesian multigenerational families. This study examines Mama Ira's case to illuminate culturally attuned mechanisms, offering insights for family scholars and policymakers promoting intergenerational well-being.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to explore the dynamics of family life among households living with in-laws (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2021). This approach was selected for its capacity to provide in-depth descriptions of experiences, social interactions, and the meanings embedded in family life, specifically in Mama Ira's household with her husband and in-laws. The qualitative design enabled the researchers to understand family members' perspectives on role division, responsibilities, communication, and strategies for maintaining household harmony in multigenerational living arrangements.

The participants comprised Mama Ira's family, with three key informants: Mama Ira, her husband, and her in-laws. Informants were selected via purposive sampling because they possessed the most in-depth knowledge of the lived experiences in this multigenerational family context.

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation (Rosidah et al., 2023). Interviews followed a guide covering ten key aspects: reasons for living with in-laws, role division, privacy boundaries, communication styles, conflict resolution, balancing responsibilities, application of religious values, the role of cohabitation in enhancing religious traditions and values, handling disagreements on child education, and key factors supporting family harmony. Observations focused on daily interactions and cooperation patterns among family members. Documentation included field notes and photographs of activities as supplementary data (Nasution, 2023).

Data analysis utilized thematic analysis, grouping interview and observation results into research themes. The process followed three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, source triangulation was applied by cross-verifying information from the three informants (Cresswell, 2012). This study aims to offer contextual insights into family harmony in households living with in-laws.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the research findings on Mama Ira's family life and her efforts to maintain household harmony while cohabiting with her mother-in-law, Nenek Karti. The discussion centers on how family members adapt to ensure comfortable coexistence under one roof. The study examines how the family fosters open communication, mutual respect, and a harmonious home environment despite intergenerational differences in roles, habits, and perspectives.

Based on interview results and direct observations, the analysis elucidates the reasons behind Mama Ira's family decision to live with in-laws. It further explores role and responsibility divisions in daily life, encompassing dynamics between spouses, between daughters/son-in-law and in-laws, and within families. Strategies to avert conflicts are detailed, including wise handling of differing opinions, maintaining personal boundaries, and cultivating mutual understanding and tolerance to sustain balanced family relationships.

Beyond presenting field findings, this chapter integrates them with relevant theories on family harmony, intrafamilial communication, and adaptability in marital life. By synthesizing empirical results with established theory, the discussion provides a comprehensive understanding of multigenerational family living. It demonstrates that family harmony can be achieved and sustained through effective communication, clear role delineation, and mutual respect, even in households sharing space with parents or in-laws (Handel, 2017).

Considerations and Roles in Mama Ira's Household

Mama Ira and her husband decided to live with her in-laws for approximately 8 years based on family considerations and moral responsibility to care for aging parents, not due to external coercion. In Indonesian culture, particularly in Javanese society, multigenerational living is commonplace as an expression of *gotong royong* (cooperation) (Ichsan et al., 2025) and as a means of supporting family members who need companionship. After the brother-in-law chose independent living, the in-laws were left alone, prompting Mama Ira and her husband to provide companionship to alleviate loneliness, ensure daily needs are met, and mitigate health risks common among rural elderly (Penniman, 2018).

As the in-laws aged, their physical condition weakened and their health declined, requiring intensive attention, routine medical care, and assistance with daily activities such as eating, dressing, and mobility. Cohabitation offers an optimal solution by enabling direct supervision and the fulfillment of children's and in-laws' needs, more efficiently than limited external care services in Indonesia. It aligns with family systems theory, which holds that the family serves as the primary support unit for vulnerable members (Sidiqoh & Ashari, 2023).

Beyond physical needs, cohabitation aims to provide crucial emotional support for the in-laws, such as daily companionship and psychological security, which often diminish in older people due to social isolation. Living together strengthens family bonds, reflecting Islamic and Nusantara values of *keluarga sakinah* (harmonious family), where children bear moral responsibility (*takwa keluarga*) for parental well-being. It reduces elderly depression and enhances overall family cohesion (Santrock, 2018).

In daily life, Mama Ira's family implements a flexible yet balanced division of roles and responsibilities at home, with each member having primary tasks that can be exchanged based on situations, abilities, and workloads. This pattern prevents individual burnout and

ensures that all household chores—like cleaning, cooking, and caregiving—are completed efficiently without overburdening anyone. Such equitable division, rooted in equity theory, maintains family harmony by making every member feel valued, involved, and meaningfully contributing (Wongpy & Setiawan, 2019).

Mama Ira's in-laws remain active in trading despite advanced age, demonstrating high independence and a productive family role that eases others' economic burdens. This activity boosts their self-confidence and sense of usefulness, while contributing to household prosperity and family social status in the community. In contemporary Indonesian gender perspectives, older women's roles extend beyond domestic duties to support family economics and solidarity, with the family fully backing them to foster a warm, harmonious home atmosphere (Norma et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, Mama Ira takes the primary role in household management, especially cooking for the entire family, though the in-laws often assist as their physical capacity allows. This collaboration cultivates authentic cooperation, ensuring that every member feels involved, appreciated, and not isolated in daily routines. Such joint approaches reduce role conflicts and boost emotional satisfaction, as evidenced in Southeast Asian multigenerational family studies (Hoang & Kirby, 2019).

Mama Ira's family dynamics exemplify successful adaptation to Indonesia's challenges posed by an aging population, where multigenerational living remains dominant amid rising urbanization. This model meets practical and emotional needs while building family resilience through flexible role division and support for elderly independence (McKenna et al., 2022). These findings are relevant to social policies, such as elderly accompaniment programs, that integrate local cultural values into sustainable family development planning.

Strategies for Maintaining Harmony Through Rules and Communication

In Mama Ira's multigenerational household, clear boundaries are established to preserve family harmony and nuclear family privacy. Financial matters represent a primary boundary, with in-laws refraining from involvement in the core family's fiscal management. All parental needs—such as meals, medications, and other essentials—are fully covered by Mama Ira and her husband. These demarcations foster mutual comfort and respect, preventing intrusions or disruptions.

Such provisions underscore the value of healthy boundaries in multigenerational families. In-laws avoid inquiring about the husband's salary or its allocation, deeming such interference unethical. This delineation balances involvement with privacy, mitigating conflicts arising from personal or financial affairs.

Effective communication complements these boundaries as a cornerstone of family harmony, providing the primary foundation for navigating life's challenges and averting fragmentation (Amalia et al., 2025). Mama Ira maintains openness with her husband and in-laws on key matters, while they treat her with the warmth reserved for a biological child. This communicative pattern cultivates a comfortable, tension-free environment that promotes mutual understanding.

The family routinely engages in informal sharing of stories and experiences from both Mama Ira's side and the in-laws'. These interactions bolster emotional bonds and heighten sensitivity to one another's feelings. Open communication minimizes misunderstandings, sustaining harmonious, trust-based relationships. Fundamentally, harmonious families are characterized by mutual respect, quality time together, and effective, open communication (Yulianti et al., 2023).

By integrating explicit boundaries with effective communication, Mama Ira's family sustains household harmony while honoring individual privacy. These elements—clear rules and robust dialogue—create a warm, appreciative home atmosphere, as positive relationships flourish amid warmth, understanding, and affection, fostering closeness and joy (Marisa et al., 2021).

Conflict Resolution and Role Balance between Spouse and In-Laws

In navigating communal family life, families inevitably encounter divergent opinions or interpersonal conflicts. According to Mama Ira, such issues should be addressed with a judicious, composed attitude. When confronted with conflicts, she typically shares her experiences with her own mother to obtain a more impartial perspective before proceeding with further discussions. This approach effectively mitigates excessive emotional responses, preventing escalation that could worsen the atmosphere and amplify the problem into broader discord (Anwer et al., 2024).

When disagreements arise with her husband or in-laws, Mama Ira prioritizes initial discussions with her spouse to determine the optimal resolution collaboratively. This practice underscores the pivotal role of open communication within the family unit, wherein each member is allowed to articulate their viewpoints candidly yet respectfully. Empirical evidence from family systems theory, such as Bowen's differentiation of self, supports that such communicative strategies foster constructive conflict resolution, thereby sustaining relational harmony and preventing chronic relational strain.

Beyond mere conflict resolution, Mama Ira grapples with the challenge of equilibrating her dual roles as daughter-in-law and wife. She achieves this balance by equitably distributing resources and attention between her husband and in-laws. For instance, upon receiving additional financial provisions, she ensures she shares them with her in-laws while maintaining robust communication and relational bonds with her spouse. This equitable paradigm not only preserves familial equilibrium but also diminishes the likelihood of conflicts stemming from perceptions of inequity or neglect, aligning with equity theory in social psychology, which posits that perceived fairness enhances relational satisfaction (Puaschunder, 2017).

Mama Ira executes her multifaceted roles by consistently prioritizing transparent communication with her husband. Through candid dialogues about mutual expectations and emotions, they cultivate mutual comprehension and devise tailored solutions amid divergences. This communicative framework is indispensable for fortifying marital bonds and fostering mutual support, particularly under the pressures of extended family obligations. Research in attachment theory, notably by Bowlby, illustrates how secure relational communications buffer against role-related stressors, promoting resilience in nuclear and extended family structures.

Furthermore, Mama Ira's methodology exemplifies proactive emotional regulation, drawing on cognitive-behavioral principles in which preemptive neutral consultations serve as a cognitive reappraisal technique. It prevents impulsive reactions that could perpetuate cycles of negativity, as documented in Gottman's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse model (criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling). By intervening early, she transforms potential adversarial encounters into opportunities for growth, enhancing overall family cohesion (Masson, n.d.).

In extended analysis, her resource-sharing strategy reflects cultural norms in collectivist societies like Indonesia, where familial interdependence is paramount. Studies from anthropological research on Javanese kinship systems highlight how such redistributive practices reinforce social capital and mitigate intergenerational tensions (Schröder-Butterfill, 2004). Mama Ira's approach thus not only resolves immediate conflicts but also embeds long-term preventive mechanisms, contributing to intergenerational harmony and familial longevity.

The synergy of Mama Ira's sagacious conflict resolution tactics and equilibrated role enactment sustains familial harmony. By employing composure, open discourse, and impartial resource allocation, families can transcend divergent opinions without relational erosion, cultivating an environment of comfort, reciprocity, and mutual esteem. This model offers valuable insights for family therapy interventions and educational programs on relational dynamics in multicultural contexts.

Implementation of *Birrul Walidain* in Maintaining Household Harmony

The application of *birrul walidain*—piety and obedience toward parents—forms a cornerstone of *family muamalah* (interpersonal transactions), demanding a delicate balance between honoring parents and maintaining household harmony. According to the analyzed article, Mama Ira exemplifies how this practice can be implemented wisely through everyday patience and mutual respect (Herman, 2025). Her approach underscores that true devotion does not rigidify family roles but adapts them to foster unity, preventing potential conflicts from escalating.

From a religious perspective, Mama Ira emphasizes patience (*sabr*) as essential when navigating challenges, such as differing opinions with in-laws. She consciously manages her emotions, avoiding reactive responses that could disrupt family ties, in line with Quranic injunctions like Surah Al-Isra (17:23-24), which command kindness to parents while prioritizing relational peace. It involves actively valuing the input of both in-laws and spouse in household decisions, transforming potential friction into opportunities for collective wisdom (Minuchin, 2018).

Mama Ira views patience as the primary key to upholding *birrul walidain* without sacrificing the core family's harmony. This mindset ensures religious values remain intact and consistently practiced amid daily routines. By prioritizing restraint, she models how Islamic

ethics can permeate mundane interactions, such as meal preparations or child-rearing discussions, thereby reinforcing familial bonds rather than straining them.

Psychologically, this balanced approach yields long-term benefits, including reduced stress and enhanced emotional resilience for all family members. Mama Ira's strategy aligns with contemporary family systems theory, which holds that mutual respect serves as a buffer against intergenerational conflict. Her consistent application demonstrates that *birrul walidain* is not merely dutiful compliance but a proactive virtue that cultivates empathy, allowing nuclear families to thrive while honoring extended kin.

Ultimately, Mama Ira's lived example illustrates how faith-based *muamalah* creates equilibrium between parental obligations and spousal tranquility. Grounded in religious principles yet adaptable to modern contexts, this model offers a blueprint for Islamic families worldwide. It promotes sustainable harmony, where piety elevates rather than burdens relationships, ensuring both spiritual fulfillment and practical stability (Herman, 2025).

The Impact of Living with In-Laws on Strengthening Family Religious Culture

Living with in-laws significantly reinforces traditions and religious activities within Mama Ira's family life. This cohabitation under one roof fosters a more palpable religious atmosphere through collective religious practices. Daily interactions among family members serve as a medium for mutual reminders in fulfilling religious obligations, embedding religiosity into the fabric of everyday routines.

One prominent positive impact is the habit of mutual reminders when prayer times arrive. This practice not only bolsters worship discipline but also cultivates a collective sense of responsibility toward religious teachings (Ludfi & Fina, 2024). Moreover, Quran recitation sessions occur more frequently due to encouragement from both in-laws and the nuclear family, transforming individual devotion into a shared family norm that enhances spiritual cohesion.

Shared engagement in religious activities fosters a serene, harmonious household environment. Religious life transcends individualism, evolving into a consistent family culture. From an Islamic sociological perspective, this aligns with the concept of ukhuwwah (fraternal bonds), in which intergenerational living reinforces *muamalah* (social transactions)

grounded in faith, as evidenced by studies of extended families in Indonesian Muslim communities (Putra et al., 2025).

Furthermore, this arrangement promotes the transmission of religious knowledge across generations. In-laws, often bearing greater experiential wisdom, model advanced practices such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and voluntary prayers, which the younger generation emulates. Such dynamics mitigate secular influences from modern urban life, preserving core Islamic values and fostering resilience against cultural dilution, consistent with family systems theory (Awoyemi, 2025).

Ultimately, co-residing with in-laws emerges as a supportive factor in fortifying faith-based family muamalah, while cultivating a religiously infused home environment rich in togetherness. This model not only sustains spiritual vitality but also contributes to familial well-being, offering valuable insights for educational programs in Islamic family management.

DISCUSSION

The Difference in Child Education Between Parental Responsibility and Religious Moderation

From the perspective of religious moderation (moderasi beragama), managing divergent views on child education between parents and in-laws can be systematically integrated through core Islamic principles. These principles provide a balanced framework that harmonizes familial authority, mutual respect, and communicative equilibrium, fostering family cohesion without compromising parental responsibilities. This approach aligns with contemporary educational management theories that emphasize collaborative decision-making in multicultural or intergenerational family contexts, while drawing on classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to provide ethical grounding.

First, the principle of *aulawiyah* (prioritization) underscores the imperative of adhering to hierarchical scales of responsibility. In familial structures, primary authority for child education decisions resides unequivocally with biological parents, as they bear the ultimate amanah (trust) from Allah for their offspring's holistic development—encompassing moral, intellectual, and spiritual growth. This foundational tenet, rooted in Qur'anic injunctions such as QS Al-Tahrim (66:6), which mandates parental guardianship,

prevents dilution of accountability. Scholarly analyses in Islamic education management, such as those by Al-Attas (1979), reinforce that neglecting this priority risks suboptimal child outcomes, positioning aulawiyah as the bedrock for resolving conflicts.

Second, tasamuh (tolerance) serves as the pivotal mechanism for interpersonal engagement with in-laws. Defined in Islamic scholarship as an open-hearted acknowledgment and respect for differing opinions without necessitating full endorsement (Nasr, 2004), *tasamuh* encourages parents to listen to in-laws' perspectives actively—perhaps rooted in traditional child-rearing norms—while upholding their own reasoned stance. This practice not only mitigates potential discord but also models virtuous behavior for children, aligning with educational methodologies that promote empathy as a core competency. Empirical studies on family dynamics in Indonesian Muslim households indicate that such tolerance reduces intergenerational tension, enhancing long-term relational stability (Jingyi & Jiangli, 2024).

Third, communication must embody *tawazun* (balance), employing "soft-spoken words" (*qawlan layyinan*) as prescribed in Prophetic traditions for *da'wah* (invitation to faith; Qur'an 20:44). Following attentive listening, parents should articulate their final decisions—derived through *musyawarah* (deliberative consultation; Qur'an 42:38)—with clarity, courtesy, and evidence-based reasoning. This balanced discourse transforms potential confrontations into opportunities for mutual edification, reflecting *tawazun's* role in sustaining equilibrium amid diversity. In the educational leadership literature, this mirrors conflict-resolution models like Thomas-Kilmann's, adapted here to Islamic contexts for harmonious family governance (Babaloya, 2019).

The practices exemplified by Mama Ira and her husband transcend mere internal family resolutions; they demonstrate a sophisticated application of religious moderation. By fusing the assertiveness of *Aulawiyah*, the respect of *Tasamuh*, and the wisdom of *Tawazun*, this approach safeguards family harmony while prioritizing child welfare. Such integration offers a scalable model for Islamic education management, applicable in diverse socio-cultural settings, and warrants further empirical research to quantify its efficacy in modern parenting paradigms.

Harmonizing Life with In-Laws: Patience and Mutual Respect are the Keys

Living in an extended family structure, where in-laws reside under one roof, is often perceived as a significant challenge in household management. However, sustaining harmony

in such environments fundamentally relies on the integrity of personal values and the quality of interactions among family members. Case studies of multigenerational families reveal that the primary keys to fostering peace are active practices of patience and consistent mutual respect. These elements serve as emotional adhesives that prevent fragmentation arising from intergenerational differences in perspectives or cultural backgrounds (Francis, 2023).

In this context, patience transcends mere passive restraint from anger; it constitutes a crucial moral foundation for building resilient, healthy family dynamics. Amid rapid moral modernization, patience emerges as a central pillar enabling spouses and parents to navigate social pressures and daily domestic dynamics (Qotrunnada & Masyithoh, 2025). For a daughter-in-law, exercising patience amid differing temperaments or in-laws' habits manifests noble character. Core moral values—such as honesty, patience, and compassion—enable family members to feel secure and valued. Consequently, household harmony can be preserved despite internal or external challenges.

Beyond patience, effective interpersonal communication acts as a vital bridge for understanding mutual expectations and needs. Research findings indicate that levels of openness and willingness to assist significantly influence the quality of relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Primary barriers often include awkwardness or reluctance to disclose ongoing issues. Thus, cultivating an open household atmosphere through informal dialogue, humor, and quality shared time is essential for enhancing empathy (Winters, 2020). Positive, warm communication can transform initial awkwardness into profound emotional closeness, akin to parent-child bonds.

Nevertheless, efforts to build harmony must account for complex psychological dynamics, including potential covert competition for the male figure's attention, who assumes dual roles as husband and son. Such emotional rivalries can be mitigated only if all parties prioritize respect and acknowledge the nuclear family's boundaries. By valuing decisions made by in-laws while in-laws respect the autonomy of the young couple's household, excessive friction or interference can be minimized. Ultimately, the harmonious integration of robust patience, open communication, and genuine appreciation creates a home environment that is not only peaceful but also spiritually enriching and serene for all inhabitants (Martina, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study on strategies for maintaining marital harmony in the context of cohabitation with in-laws, exemplified by Mama Ira's family, reveals that family harmony can be effectively achieved despite shared living arrangements when supported by open communication, equitable role distribution, and clearly defined boundaries between nuclear and extended family units. The decision to live together stems from a sense of responsibility and familial affection rather than coercion, fostering sincere relationships grounded in cultural values. Key strategies employed include deliberative decision-making, prudent conflict management, balanced attention to spousal and in-law roles, and firm boundaries in finances and child-rearing to avert excessive interference. Integrating religious values, particularly *birrul walidain* (kindness to parents), underpins this harmony through patience, mutual respect, and familial hierarchy, while yielding positive outcomes such as enhanced collective worship and mutual reminders of goodness. Ultimately, these findings affirm that cohabitation with in-laws need not precipitate conflict but can strengthen family bonds when managed through effective communication, fair role-sharing, healthy boundaries, and the daily practice of religious principles, offering practical insights for family counseling and Islamic education on resilient household dynamics.

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