

Strengthening Resilience among Women from Christian Minority Groups in Indonesia: Strengthening Development Approach

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Submitted: 26 October 2025 | Accepted: 22 May 2026 | Published: 30 May 2026

Citation (APA Style):

Natanael, O., & Tandana, E. A. (2026). Strengthening Resilience among Women from Christian Minority Groups in Indonesia: Strengthening Development Approach. *CHEVRA: Indonesian Journal of Economic, Science, and Humanities*, 1(1): 17-28. <https://doi.org/10.46362/chevra.v1i1.109>.

Abstract:

Women from Christian minority groups in Indonesia face complex challenges, ranging from socio-religious discrimination, limited access to education and health, to gender-based violence and double burden in the household and community. This article aims to examine the forms of resilience they develop and offer a community-based strengthening approach as an empowerment strategy. The research uses qualitative methods with case studies, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory observation in minority Christian communities. Findings show that the support of churches, Christian women's organizations, and informal initiatives such as prayer groups and cooperatives are the foundation of social and spiritual resilience. This article contributes to contextual theology and inclusive development by emphasizing the role of community support, women's leadership, and interfaith cooperation in strengthening resilience and promoting justice.

Keywords: resilience; minority Christian women; community empowerment; gender-based challenges; interfaith collaboration

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country of great religious, cultural and ethnic diversity. In this context, Christians are one of the minority religious communities, especially in Muslim-majority areas. Women from Christian minority groups face multiple challenges, both in terms of religion and gender (Künkler & Stepan, 2013). They are often in a vulnerable position due to structural and social discrimination that is entrenched in society (McLeod, 2015). These issues are becoming increasingly relevant to examine academically and praxis.

Resilience is an important concept in understanding how Christian minority women survive and thrive amidst social, economic and religious pressures. Resilience not only includes the ability to recover from stress, but also involves an active process of building

strength from within the self and community (Nussbaum, 2000). In the context of women, resilience is often rooted in social networks, spiritual values and everyday adaptation strategies (Ewart, 2017). Resilience is not a passive state, but a form of agency that reflects the struggle to live with dignity (Kabeer, 1999). Therefore, the study of resilience must consider the social and religious context in which women live.

Christian women from minority groups in Indonesia face various forms of injustice, including social exclusion, religious stereotyping and limited access to resources (Ibrahim, 2021). In addition, their experiences are also influenced by patriarchal cultural norms that place women in subordinate positions (Hooks, 2000). In situations of conflict or religious oppression, women are often the first victims but also the first agents of healing within the community (Schirch, 2004). Churches and religious institutions do not necessarily provide sufficient protection, and in some cases can even perpetuate gender inequality (Johnson, 1993). This calls for a new, more transformative approach to strengthening resilience.

The empowerment for development approach is one of the effective strategies to build women's resilience. Empowerment does not only mean providing assistance, but growing individual and collective capacity to determine the direction of their own lives (Adi, 2013). In the context of minority Christian women, empowerment also means strengthening their religious identity, which is often ostracized (Putrawan, 2022). This approach requires collaboration between local, church, state and civil society actors (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). When women are given space to speak and act, resilience processes become more sustainable and contextualized.

Contextual theology has an important contribution to make in supporting women's empowerment and resilience. By understanding faith dynamically in a particular social context, contextual theology helps women find spiritual meaning in their struggles (Oduyoye, 2001). Theologies that live from women's real experiences are able to challenge oppressive structures and promote social change (Dube, 2003). In minority Christian communities, this kind of theology gives strength to survive while building solidarity (Boeve & Brabant, 2010). Thus, spiritual and structural approaches cannot be separated in discussing resilience.

Minority women's issues are not just religious or gender issues, but touch on dimensions of human rights and social justice. Efforts to strengthen the resilience of minority Christian women should be understood as part of a global movement towards

equality and protection of vulnerable groups (Arat, 2015). Interdisciplinary and interfaith studies are needed to create effective and ethical interventions. Therefore, the approach used must not only be scientific, but also sensitive to local cultures and beliefs. Social interventions that are not sensitive to spiritual values may fail to address the root of the problem.

This article aims to explore how a developmental strengthening approach can strengthen the resilience of women from Christian minority groups in Indonesia. Using a conceptual framework that combines theories of resilience, empowerment, and contextual theology, this article will map the challenges and resilience strategies that have been and can be developed. The study also highlights the importance of women's participation in formulating solutions to their own problems. The results of this paper are expected to make academic and practical contributions to the development of more inclusive communities. Ultimately, the resilience of minority Christian women is not just about survival, but about living out hope in difficult situations.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study design to explore the experiences and resilience strategies of women from Christian minority groups in Indonesia. A qualitative approach allows researchers to understand the subjective meanings formed by participants in their social and religious contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Case studies were chosen because they provide an in-depth understanding of specific dynamics within a particular community (Yin, 2018). Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies from religious organizations and women's communities. Data analysis was conducted through a thematic coding process to identify relevant patterns, categories and key narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants were purposively selected as Christian women who belonged to a minority in an area dominated by other religions. The selection criteria involved active involvement in the community as well as experience with social or religious pressure (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Data validity was strengthened by triangulating sources and methods, as well as member checking with participants to ensure accurate interpretations (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The researcher also applied

reflexivity to realize the position and potential bias during the data collection and analysis process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). All research procedures were conducted in accordance with the principles of research ethics, including informed consent and protection of participants' identities (Babbie, 2016).

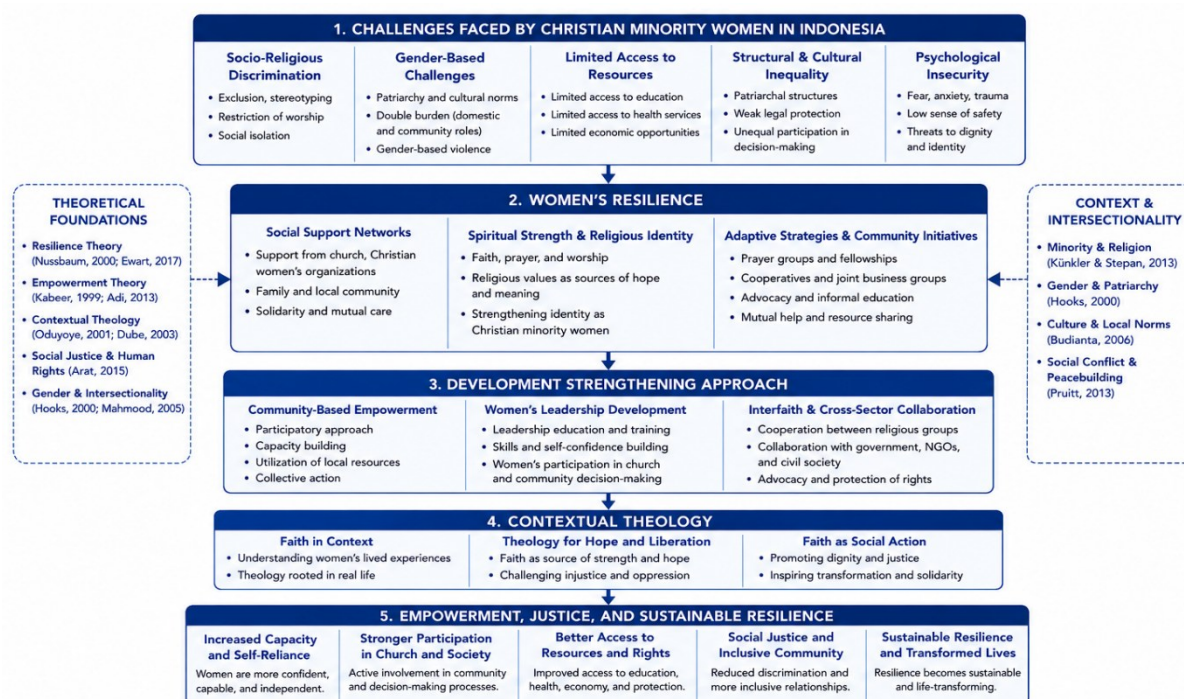


Figure 1. Theoretical Map of Strengthening Resilience among Women from Christian Minority Groups in Indonesia

RESULT

Studies on women's resilience in religious minority contexts show that women often develop unique adaptation strategies to deal with discrimination and marginalization (Ewart, 2017; Ibrahim, 2021). The concept of resilience includes not only the ability to survive, but also the development of internal strengths and social networks that support survival (Kabeer, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000). In Christian minority communities in Indonesia, this resilience is influenced by the interaction between social, cultural and religious factors (McLeod, 2015; Putrawan, 2022). Previous studies emphasize the importance of a holistic understanding that combines psychological and social aspects in interpreting resilience (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Thus, women's resilience is a dynamic process that requires structural and personal support.

Women's empowerment is one of the key approaches in strengthening their resilience amidst inequality (Adi, 2013; Parawansa, 2002). Empowerment involves increasing women's capacity to access resources, make decisions, and influence their social environment (Kabeer, 1999; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). In Indonesia, the empowerment of minority Christian women faces dual challenges, namely social pressure from the majority and patriarchal norms within their own communities (Hooks, 2000; Lestari, 2020). Therefore, empowerment interventions must be carried out with local contextual and cultural sensitivity (Putrawan, 2022). This requires cross-sectoral cooperation between churches, civil society organizations, and the government.

Contextual theology offers a highly relevant reflective framework for understanding the experiences of Christian minority women (Oduyoye, 2001; Dube, 2003). It places lived experience as the primary source of faith reflection, thus giving voice to the marginalized (Boeve & Brabant, 2010). Through contextual theology, women can interpret religious teachings in ways that strengthen their dignity and identity (Johnson, 1993). In addition, this theology challenges oppressive power structures and promotes social justice (Dube, 2003). Therefore, this theological approach is important in supporting the empowerment and resilience of minority Christian women.

Discrimination and marginalization of women from Christian minority groups has multiple dimensions, ranging from social restrictions to gender-based harassment and violence (Ibrahim, 2021; Schirch, 2004). Minority women often experience multiple pressures, both as members of a religious minority and as women in a patriarchal society (Hooks, 2000; Mahmood, 2005). Studies on social conflict in Indonesia show that women are often direct victims but also agents of peace (Pruitt, 2013). Addressing this issue requires a multidimensional approach that incorporates legal, social and religious aspects (Arat, 2015). Thus, strengthening women's resilience must take into account the complex socio-political context.

The role of social and community networks is critical in building minority women's resilience (Ewart, 2017; Kabeer, 1999). These networks provide emotional, material and informational support that helps women overcome various challenges (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Within minority Christian communities, the role of churches and women's groups is strategic as spaces of solidarity and empowerment (Putrawan, 2022; McLeod, 2015). The existence of informal and formal groups increases women's capacity to survive and

transform (Schirch, 2004). This reinforces the idea that resilience is not only an individual issue, but also a collective one.

Women's empowerment approaches are often linked to sustainable development and human rights (Nussbaum, 2000; Arat, 2015). Strengthening women in minority communities is part of global efforts to reduce poverty, discrimination and gender inequality (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Kabeer, 1999). International studies show that women's involvement in decision-making can improve overall community well-being (McLeod, 2015). However, the implementation of empowerment must take into account the unique characteristics of minority groups and the local context (Lestari, 2020). Therefore, development strategies must be contextualized and participatory.

In the Indonesian context, the relationship between religion, culture and gender often shapes the experiences of minority women in complex ways (Künkler & Stepan, 2013; Budianta, 2006). Islam as the majority has a strong influence in shaping social norms, which impacts on Christian minority groups (Mahmood, 2005; Woodward, 2011). Christian minority women face the challenge of maintaining their religious identity while adapting to majority social norms (Putrawan, 2022). The study of the interaction of religion and gender is important to understand the dynamics of women's resilience (Bielefeld, 2012). A multidisciplinary approach is needed to address this issue comprehensively.

Technology and media are also beginning to play a role in strengthening minority women's resilience by providing a platform for sharing experiences and building solidarity (Chandra & Acosta, 2009). The use of social media helps women organize themselves and access resources that were previously difficult to reach (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). However, access to technology also has limitations, especially for women in remote areas or with economic limitations (Ewart, 2017). Therefore, technological capacity building should be part of empowerment programs (Adi, 2013). Technological innovations must be tailored to the needs and conditions of the community.

It is important to emphasize that research on Christian minority women's resilience should consider ethical aspects and cultural sensitivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Babbie, 2016). Researchers should act as partners in the empowerment process, not just observers (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A participatory approach encourages women's active involvement in all stages of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It also helps maintain the validity and relevance of the research results (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña,

2014). Thus, ethical and inclusive research can lead to meaningful and sustainable recommendations.

DISCUSSION

Challenges faced by minority Christian women

Minority Christian women in Indonesia often experience socio-religious discrimination that limits their movement and participation in various areas of life (Ibrahim, 2021; Künkler & Stepan, 2013). This discrimination does not only arise from the majority society, but can also come from within the community itself, reinforcing double marginalization (Hooks, 2000; McLeod, 2015). Limited access to education, health services and economic opportunities exacerbate their conditions, causing significant social disparities (Adi, 2013; Lestari, 2020). The double burden of being a woman responsible for family and community adds to physical and psychological stress (Mahmood, 2005; Parawansa, 2002). Gender-based violence, both physical and psychological, is also a serious threat that is often hidden and difficult to report (Schirch, 2004; Ibrahim, 2021).

Socio-religious inequalities often lead to social isolation for Christian minority women, limiting their access to public resources and services (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Pruitt, 2013). In patriarchal contexts, women also face cultural pressures that inhibit their participation in decision-making, both in families and communities (Hooks, 2000; Johnson, 1993). Studies show that Christian minority women experience multiple marginalizations resulting in low participation in socio-economic development (Bielefeld, 2012; Ewart, 2017). Limited access to education in particular impacts on reduced employment opportunities and economic empowerment (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Adi, 2013). In addition, social and cultural pressures make it difficult for many women to access gender-sensitive health services (Lestari, 2020).

Discrimination is also implicated in psychological insecurity that affects the mental well-being of minority Christian women (Ibrahim, 2021; Dube, 2003). Pressure from the majority social environment sometimes leads to prolonged fear and anxiety (Mahmood, 2005). The double burden faced, especially in relation to childcare and domestic work, reinforces women's vulnerability (Hooks, 2000; Parawansa, 2002). Gender-based violence, including domestic violence and harassment in the workplace, is also often an issue that has not received adequate attention (Schirch, 2004; Ibrahim, 2021). Taken

together, these challenges form a complex social context and require a multi-dimensional approach.

Existing Resilience Strategy

In the face of these challenges, support from the church and local community has proven to be a key source of resilience for minority Christian women (Putrawan, 2022; McLeod, 2015). The church as a religious institution provides a space for women to gather, pray, and strengthen each other in difficult situations (Boeve & Brabant, 2010; Johnson, 1993). In addition, local communities help build social networks that provide emotional and material support (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Ewart, 2017). The role of Christian women's organizations is also very strategic in fighting for rights and access for women (Adi, 2013; Lestari, 2020). They play a role in organizing training, advocacy, and empowerment programs that increase women's capacity.

Prayer groups and other informal initiatives, such as cooperatives and joint business groups, are effective alternative spaces for building solidarity and economic resilience (Schirch, 2004; Putrawan, 2022). These activities not only help meet the economic needs of families, but also strengthen a sense of community and collective identity (Ewart, 2017; Kabeer, 1999). These initiatives often operate independently with minimal resources, signaling women's high creativity and initiative (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Mahmood, 2005). Through these activities, women are able to minimize the impact of social pressure while increasing their bargaining power within the community (McLeod, 2015). Therefore, this resilience strategy is important as a foundation for further development.

Strengthening Development Approach

The community-based empowerment approach is one of the main strategies in strengthening the resilience of Christian minority women (Adi, 2013; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). This approach focuses on developing women's capacity collectively and utilizing local resources (Kabeer, 1999; Putrawan, 2022). Leadership education for Christian women is an important part of preparing them to take on strategic roles in the community and church (Johnson, 1993; Lestari, 2020). This training not only strengthens technical and managerial skills, but also builds self-confidence and negotiation skills (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Thus, women become agents of change who are able to influence local policies and social practices.

Interfaith and cross-sector collaboration is also an effective approach to addressing complex challenges (Bielefeld, 2012; Arat, 2015). This collaboration can build bridges of communication and reduce prejudice between different religious groups (Künkler & Stepan, 2013; Pruitt, 2013). Cross-sector collaboration, such as between government, NGOs and religious institutions, can improve women's access to education, health and economic opportunities (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Adi, 2013). This collaborative approach also strengthens advocacy and oversight of the implementation of minority women's rights (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). The implementation of this strategy is expected to have a broader and more sustainable impact.

Theological and Social Implications

Contextual theology emphasizes the importance of understanding women's suffering as part of a faith experience that fosters hope and liberation (Oduyoye, 2001; Dube, 2003). This theological approach views resilience as an active and reflective practice of faith, rather than a passive endurance (Boeve & Brabant, 2010; Johnson, 1993). The resilience of Christian minority women is also a manifestation of social action that breaks down injustice and demands structural change (Schirch, 2004; Mahmood, 2005). Thus, faith becomes a source of strength and motivation to continue to struggle beyond existing limitations (Nussbaum, 2000; Kabeer, 1999). Contextual theology encourages women to find meaning in suffering while playing an active role in the liberation process.

Resilience as a practice of faith integrally combines spiritual and social aspects, forming a critical attitude towards injustice and a deep sense of solidarity (Dube, 2003; Boeve & Brabant, 2010). Through community experiences and church support, minority Christian women are able to develop an inclusive and equitable vision of the future (Putrawan, 2022; McLeod, 2015). The social implications are seen in women's increased participation in community life and decision-making processes (Adi, 2013; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). This approach also reinforces values of togetherness and respect for human rights (Arat, 2015; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Overall, the resilience of Christian minority women is a concrete example of the integration of faith and social action.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that women from Christian minority groups in Indonesia face significant challenges, ranging from socio-religious discrimination, limited

access to education and economy, to double burden and gender-based violence. Despite this, they have developed various resilience strategies through the support of churches, local communities, women's organizations, and informal initiatives such as prayer groups and cooperatives. Community-based development strengthening approaches and women's leadership education have proven effective in increasing their capacity to survive and transform. Collaboration across religions and sectors also plays an important role in expanding access and building solidarity. Theological implications confirm that women's resilience is a practice of faith rooted in hope and social action for liberation.

As a suggestion, there is a need for an integrated and sustainable program to empower minority Christian women, with special attention to the local social and cultural context. Leadership education and skills training should be prioritized to strengthen women's roles in religious communities and organizations. The government and relevant agencies should support interfaith and sector collaboration to expand access to services and economic opportunities. In addition, churches and communities need to strengthen emotional and social support networks as the foundation of women's resilience. Finally, further research with participatory and gender-sensitive approaches is urgently needed to produce solutions that are relevant and have long-term impact.

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