



BALANCING CHILD EDUCATION AND PARENTAL CARE: THE SANDWICH GENERATION FROM AN ISLAMIC EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE



Imel Putri Dewita , Goestina

*Correspondence :

imel.putri81@gmail.com

Affiliation:

¹² STAI YAPIS TAKALAR,
Sulawesi Selatan Indonesia

Article History:

Received: May 23, 2026
Reviewed: June 19, 2026
Accepted: June 30, 2026
Published: July 31, 2026

Keywords: Sandwich Generation, Role Conflict, Lived Religion, Birrul Walidain, Islamic Educational Values.

DOI :

[10.30983/educative.v11i1.11327](https://doi.org/10.30983/educative.v11i1.11327)

Abstract

The "sandwich generation" confronts multidimensional pressures in balancing modern employment with the dual responsibilities of eldercare and child-rearing. While secular literature heavily frames this as a structural crisis leading to caregiver burnout, empirical studies within the framework of Islamic education remain scarce. This qualitative study explores how working mothers negotiate these role conflicts by actualizing Islamic educational values as a "lived religion." Employing a descriptive-analytical design, data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations with 13 working mothers of Nasyiatul 'Aisyiyah in Takalar Regency. The findings reveal three main themes. First, participants face severe structural vulnerabilities driven by systemic financial strain and time scarcity. Second, rather than succumbing to burnout, they cognitively reconstruct this dual burden into a divine trust (Amanah). The domestic sphere is utilized as a multidimensional worship space, integrating Birrul Walidain (filial piety) with Tarbiyah bil Qudwah (education through role modeling). Third, Islamic values Ikhlas (sincerity), Sabr (patience), Tawakkul (reliance on God), and Syukur (gratitude) are operationalized as active psycho-spiritual mechanisms, functioning as a mental shield against economic anxiety and emotional spillover. This study concludes that Islamic spiritual resilience challenges secular paradigms of inevitable caregiver exhaustion. These findings contribute to a contextual understanding of how Islamic educational values support role negotiation among working mothers within the Nasyiatul 'Aisyiyah community in Takalar Regency. They also provide an empirical reference for developing family education and counseling programs in similar Muslim community organizations, rather than proposing a universally applicable model.

INTRODUCTION

The current demographic shift in Indonesia indicates a significant trend toward an aging population. According to data from Statistics Indonesia, the percentage of the elderly population continues to rise, marking the country's entry into the aging population phase, with the number of older people projected to reach 63.71 million by 2045 (BPS, 2021). This demographic reality is reflected in the dependency ratio, which reached 16.76% in 2021, meaning that for every 100 economically active individuals, there are at least 17 elderly individuals to be supported (Sulintang, A., Saragih, et.al, 2024). This poses a substantial challenge for the productive-age group, who frequently find themselves navigating the "sandwich generation" phenomenon. In Indonesia, this is a prevalent reality, as approximately 39.10% of married couples live in multigenerational households with their parents (Sudarji, S., Panggabean, H., & Marta, 2022). Driven by economic pressures and cultural values, this issue is exacerbated by an inadequately developed social support system for older people, placing a heavy burden on families to meet basic needs (Rosemalla, E., & Wahida, 2024).

The execution of these dual roles places the sandwich generation in a complex position, exposing them to various multidimensional challenges (Safitri, 2025). From a sociological perspective, role conflict emerges as individuals struggle to allocate limited resources between domestic and public obligations. Psychologically, this double burden can trigger prolonged stress and emotional exhaustion, particularly for women who often serve as



primary caregivers and face higher risks of mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression (Irawaty, D. K., & Gayatri, 2023). Research indicates that even individuals in early adulthood (ages 20-30) are stepping into these roles due to family demands and are struggling to balance personal well-being with family responsibilities (Kautsar, et.al, 2025). The rigorous demands often lead individuals to adjust their personal savings and career aspirations, impacting the quality of care provided to both generations (Kussanti, et.al, 2025).

Although empirical reality demonstrates this heavy burden, the perspective of Islamic education offers a contrasting viewpoint by perceiving this condition as an *amanah* (divine trust) and a form of worship. Islamic scholars emphasize that the concept of the sandwich generation can be transfigured from a "burden" into a positive framework rooted in *birrul walidain* (devotion to parents) and *tarbiyah al-aulad* (children's education) (Salamuddin, A., Fahrudin, F., & Rahmat, 2024). Driven by economic pressures and cultural values, this issue is exacerbated by an inadequately developed social support system for the elderly, placing a heavy burden on families to meet basic needs ((Kusumaningrum, 2023a). To navigate these pressures, Islamic frameworks such as *Maqāsid Sharia* offer a holistic approach by striving for equilibrium across spiritual, intellectual, and material domains, thereby mitigating the dual burden by enhancing spiritual values (*hifz ad-din*) and mental well-being (*hifz an-nafs*) (Ikhsan, 2025).

Nevertheless, a clear research gap remains. While previous studies have extensively documented the economic and psychological challenges of the sandwich generation, research in Islamic education has remained largely normative-theoretical, focusing primarily on textual interpretations. Consequently, there is a scarcity of empirical qualitative studies that explore how Islamic educational values are applied in practice as "lived religion"—that is, how individuals actively integrate, experience, and interpret religious teachings in their everyday caregiving routines (Nasith, 2023).

The phenomenon of the sandwich generation is also evident among working mothers who are members of the *Nasyiatul 'Aisyiyah* association, where many simultaneously fulfill professional responsibilities while caring for both their children and aging parents. As an Islamic women's organization committed to strengthening family resilience, Islamic education, and women's empowerment, *Nasyiatul 'Aisyiyah* provides a relevant context for examining how Muslim working mothers navigate these multiple roles. Their active participation in religious, social, and family life makes them particularly suitable for exploring how Islamic educational values are translated into everyday caregiving practices and serve as practical strategies for balancing dual caregiving responsibilities. Therefore, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do working mothers in the sandwich generation manage the role conflicts and psychological pressures arising from their dual caregiving responsibilities? (2) How are Islamic educational values implemented as practical coping strategies and "lived religion" in their daily lives?

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical research design. A qualitative method was chosen because the study aims to explore in depth the lived experiences, meanings, and social realities of individuals categorized as the sandwich generation, particularly their efforts to balance dual caregiving responsibilities within the framework of Islamic educational values. A qualitative descriptive design was therefore used

to provide a systematic and contextually grounded account of the phenomenon, while the analytical component involved coding, categorizing, and interpreting participants' accounts in relation to the concepts of *birrul walidain* and *tarbiyah al-aulad* (Villamin, P.et. al, 2025).

The data sources in this study were primary and secondary. Primary data were obtained from 13 working mothers located in Kabupaten Takalar, South Sulawesi. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on strict criteria: (1) females aged between 30 to 50 years old, (2) actively working while co-residing with and fully supporting aging parents who are no longer employed, (3) having dependent children, and (4) being active members of *Nasyiatul 'Aisyiyah* (a prominent young women's Islamic organization). The selection of *Nasyiatul 'Aisyiyah* members provides a highly relevant context for exploring how Islamic educational values are systematically operationalized in daily life.

Data collection techniques included interviews, observation, and documentation. To capture comprehensive insights into the participants' role conflicts and coping strategies, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interview procedures involved face-to-face sessions at participants' homes or at mutually agreed-upon locations, lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. A predefined interview guide based on the research questions was utilized, and all sessions were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim.

Furthermore, observation was carried out as a non-participant observer through direct home visits. Rather than merely observing general conditions, the observation was strictly operationalized to examine specific family interaction patterns and caregiving dynamics. The researcher observed the empirical realities of their daily domestic routines, specifically focusing on non-verbal interactions during eldercare (e.g., feeding or assisting parents) and downward parenting approaches (e.g., communication style with children during stressful moments). This operational approach aimed to visually capture the actualization of values like *sabr* and *tarbiyah* within the domestic space. Documentation techniques were used to strengthen the findings by drawing on relevant written sources.

The data were analyzed through an iterative qualitative process involving data organization and familiarization, coding of relevant segments, grouping codes into categories and themes, presentation of emerging findings, and interpretation and verification of identified patterns (Creswell, J. W., & Poth, 2024). In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and categorized data relevant to the study's objectives. The organized data were then presented in descriptive narrative form to facilitate interpretation and understanding of emerging patterns. Finally, conclusions were drawn to identify the forms of negotiation, adaptation, and implementation of Islamic educational values among the sandwich generation.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participants and relevant literature, while method triangulation involved comparing data from in-depth interviews, home-based observations, and documentation. Member checking was carried out by confirming the accuracy of the data and interpretations with participants. An audit trail was maintained by documenting the research process, including data collection and analysis procedures. These strategies enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Based on the two main research questions, the empirical findings of this study are categorized into three main themes. The first theme elaborates on the reality of role conflict experienced by the working mothers. The subsequent two themes address how these mothers manage such pressures by reinterpreting their burden as a divine trust and implementing Islamic educational values as a "lived religion" in their daily caregiving routines. To ensure transparency in the qualitative data analysis, the thematic categorization, empirical meanings, and related Islamic values are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Thematic Matrix of Qualitative Findings

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Empirical Reality & Meaning	Related Islamic Values	Exemplary Quote
The Reality of Role Conflict: Navigating the Double Burden	Financial Strain & Debt Cycle	Simultaneous expenses for eldercare and childcare depleted participants' savings and, in some cases, led them to seek loans or additional sources of income. secondary income.	(Empirical Pre-condition)	"To cover both ends, I had to take a bank loan. Now, almost half of my monthly salary goes directly to paying off that debt." (Participant 2)
	Scarcity of Time & Guilt	Unpredictable eldercare needs disrupted participants' professional responsibilities and childcare routines, contributing to feelings of guilt and limited career advancement.	(Empirical Pre-condition)	"I am physically present at home to care for the elderly, but emotionally, I feel like I am neglecting my children." (Participant 4)
Re-interpreting the Burden as Amanah (Divine Trust)	Implementation of Birrul Walidain	Participants interpreted the financial and physical demands of caring for their parents as acts of religious obedience and potential sources of divine blessing.	Amanah, Birrul Walidain, Barakah	"I don't see part of my salary going to my parents as a loss... I believe that taking care of them now is a direct command from Allah." (Participant 7)
	Implementation of Tarbiyah al-Aulad	Participants used every day eldercare practices as opportunities to model empathy, respect, and noble character for their children.	Tarbiyah al-Aulad, Madrasah Ula, Akhlak	"When my children watch me feeding their grandfather patiently every evening... I am teaching them empathy and akhlak through direct action..." (Participant 8)
Islamic values as perceived spiritual coping resources	<i>Ikhlas</i> as expectation management	Participants described sincerity as helping them reduce dependence on appreciation or reciprocal treatment from family members.	<i>Ikhlas</i> (Sincerity)	"Ikhlas means I do this for Allah alone. Whether they appreciate it or not, my reward is securely kept with Him." (Participant 9)
	<i>Sabr</i> as Emotional Regulation	Participants used patience to pause, regulate emotional reactions, and prevent caregiving-related frustration from affecting	<i>Sabr</i> (Patience)	"Now, sabr acts as my emotional firewall. I take a deep breath, separate the issues, and remind myself that my children are

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Empirical Reality & Meaning	Related Islamic Values	Exemplary Quote
		their interactions with their children.		observing..." (Participant 10)
	Tawakkul as a response to economic anxiety	After undertaking practical efforts (<i>ikhtiar</i>), participants relied on their belief in divine sustenance to manage uncertainty and financial anxiety.	Tawakkul (Reliance), Riza (Sustenance)	"Tawakkul means believing that if Allah commands me to care for my parents and children, He will provide the means." (Participant 11)
	Syukr as cognitive reframing	Participants redirected their attention from exhaustion and scarcity toward the perceived privilege, meaning, and affection associated with caring for two generations.	Syukr (Gratitude)	"Syukr helps me focus on the abundance of love in my house, rather than the scarcity of my energy." (Participant 12)

1. The Reality of Role Conflict: Navigating the Double Burden

The first theme captures the complex daily struggles, economic pressures, and psychological conditions experienced by the participants. The interview data reveal that all participants experience significant role conflict, as they must divide their limited resources financially, temporally, and physically between the demanding expectations of the modern workforce, the developmental needs of their children, and the declining health of their aging parents. To systematically present these findings, the empirical reality of their burden is divided into three critical dimensions: economic strain, time-management conflict, and psychological exhaustion.

Financial strain emerged as one of the most prominent challenges. Participants reported that being the "sandwich" means their income is simultaneously pulled in two opposite directions: upward to support their parents' healthcare and daily needs, and downward to secure their children's education and future. The absence of a robust institutional social security system for the elderly forces these women to rely heavily on out-of-pocket expenses. This financial tightrope often forces participants to deplete their emergency funds to survive sudden crises. Participant 1, a 42-year-old administrative staff member, described this constant anxiety of having no financial safety net:

"Financially, it is a constant juggling act with no safety net. Just last month, I had to pay my eldest son's school admission fees, and in the exact same week, my father had a severe heart complication and had to be hospitalized. I had to empty the emergency savings I was trying to build for my own family. There is literally nothing left to save for my own retirement." — (Participant 1, 42 years old, Administrative Staff)

When savings are insufficient, the dual financial burden frequently traps participants in a cycle of debt. They are forced to borrow money just to cover basic household and medical needs. Participant 2, a 38-year-old civil servant, highlighted how her fixed income struggles to meet the rising costs of caring for both ends of the generational spectrum:

"My salary is fixed, but the expenses keep growing every month. My mother needs adult diapers and routine physiotherapy that BPJS [national health insurance]

doesn't fully cover. At the same time, my twins need formula milk and daycare fees. To cover both ends, I had to take a bank loan. Now, almost half of my monthly salary goes directly to paying off that debt. It feels like I am working just to pay off arrears." — (Participant 2, 38 years old, Civil Servant)

This harsh economic reality forces many participants to seek secondary sources of income, which directly exacerbates their physical fatigue and reduces the time they have at home. Participant 3, a 35-year-old private sector employee, shared her experience of sacrificing rest to take on extra work:

"One salary is simply not enough to feed three generations under one roof. After I finish my regular shift at the office, I manage an online shop and pack orders until midnight. If I don't take on this side hustle, I have to choose between buying my mother's hypertension medicine or paying for my kids' school activities. I sacrifice my sleep so I don't ever have to make that choice." — (Participant 3, 35 years old, Private Sector Employee)

Role Conflict and the Scarcity of Time: Beyond financial issues, the struggle to allocate time between public (career) and domestic (caregiving) demands creates severe role conflict. Participants expressed that caregiving for aging parents is often highly unpredictable; sudden illnesses or emergencies frequently disrupt their professional responsibilities and carefully planned parenting routines. Participant 4, a 39-year-old corporate employee, highlighted the intense friction between maintaining a professional standard at the workplace and fulfilling her domestic duties, which often results in a profound sense of guilt:

"The hardest part is the unpredictability. I can be in the middle of an important meeting at the office when I get a call that my mother has fallen at home. I have to drop everything. But at the same time, I feel guilty for not being able to attend my daughter's school event that afternoon. I am physically present at home to care for the elderly, but emotionally, I feel like I am neglecting my children." — (Participant 4, 39 years old, Corporate Employee)

This role conflict does not only occur between the workplace and the home; it also manifests intensely within the domestic space. Participants reported a constant "tug-of-war" for their attention between their young children and their dependent parents. Participant 5, a 34-year-old retail supervisor, described the emotional turmoil of having to divide her time at home:

"When I get home from work at 6 PM, I am immediately torn. My toddler is crying for my attention, wanting to play, but my bedridden father needs to be fed and cleaned right away. I cannot physically do both at the exact same time. I often end up rushing through my father's meals so I can attend to my kids, and then I feel like a terrible, impatient daughter. There is never enough time to give both of them the quality care they deserve." — (Participant 5, 34 years old, Retail Supervisor)

Furthermore, the chronic scarcity of time forces many of these mothers to deliberately stall their professional growth. The rigid time commitment required for dual caregiving leaves no room for career advancement. Participant 6, a 41-year-old mid-level manager, shared how she had to sacrifice a significant career milestone to fulfill her family obligations:

"I was offered a promotion to a regional director position last year, but I had to turn it down. The new role required frequent out-of-town travel. There is no way I can leave my mother, who suffers from early-stage dementia, while also managing my three children and the household. My career has completely stagnated because my time is essentially chained to my family's immediate needs." — (Participant 6, 41 years old, Mid-level Manager)

The findings highlight the profound empirical burdens experienced by sandwich generation mothers, characterized by severe financial strain, time-management conflicts, and psychological exhaustion. Economically, the absence of institutional social security forces participants to absorb competing intergenerational costs, frequently leading to depleted savings, debt accumulation, and the need to pursue secondary employment. Furthermore, acute role conflict arises from a chronic scarcity of time, as unpredictable eldercare demands continuously disrupt professional obligations and child-rearing routines. This relentless domestic "tug-of-war" generates significant psychological guilt and physical fatigue, ultimately compelling these women to sacrifice their career advancement in order to sustain their demanding dual caregiving responsibilities.

2. Re-interpreting the Burden as Amanah (Divine Trust)

Despite the heavy empirical burden, the findings indicate a distinct cognitive and spiritual shift among the participants. When faced with the pressures of the sandwich generation, participants do not frame their situation as a permanent "trap" or merely a cultural obligation. Instead, they actively reinterpret their dual roles as an *amanah* (divine trust) from Allah. In implementing *Birrul Walidain* when caring for their aging parents, participants emphasized that their actions are a direct manifestation of religious obedience rather than a transactional duty. They view the financial and physical sacrifices made for their parents as a pathway to spiritual reward. This cognitive reframing is evident in how participants perceive their financial contributions. Rather than viewing the money spent on elderly care as a depletion of their own wealth, they see it as an invitation for divine blessing (*barakah*). Participant 7, a 40-year-old high school teacher, explained:

*"I don't see part of my salary going to my parents as a loss. It is *birrul walidain*. I believe that taking care of them now is a direct command from Allah. Every time I pay for my father's hospital bills, I notice that Allah opens other doors of sustenance (*rizq*) for my own family in unexpected ways."* — (Participant 7, 40 years old, High School Teacher)

Beyond financial sacrifices, the intense physical labor of caregiving is also reinterpreted as a profound form of worship. Participant 8, a 36-year-old clinic staff member, described how religious conviction transforms exhausting physical tasks into acts of devotion:

*"Bathing my bedridden mother and cleaning her soiled clothes after a long shift at work is physically draining. But I always remind myself that when I was a helpless baby, she cleaned me without disgust. This physical exhaustion is my ticket to Jannah (heaven). I am not just nursing an old woman; I am seeking the *Ridha* (pleasure) of Allah."* — (Participant 8, 36 years old, Clinic Staff)

The Implementation of *Tarbiyah al-Aulad*. Concurrently, the participants viewed the upbringing of their children as an uncompromisable duty. Interestingly, the data revealed that participants use their caregiving of their parents as a direct method of *tarbiyah* (education

and character building) for their children. By modeling respect and care for the grandparents, the mothers implicitly teach their children Islamic character values. Participant 9, a 33-year-old freelance writer, emphasized that living in a multi-generational household provides a "real-life classroom" for her children's moral development:

"I rarely have the energy to sit down and teach my kids theoretical Islamic studies after work. But when my children watch me feeding their grandfather patiently every evening, or holding his hand when he is in pain, that is their real classroom. I am teaching them empathy and akhlak (noble character) through direct action, not just words." — (Participant 9, 33 years old, Freelance Writer)

The findings demonstrate that participants cognitively reframe the burdens of the sandwich generation by conceptualizing their dual caregiving roles as an *amanah* (divine trust). Through the lens of *birrul walidain*, the financial and physical sacrifices of eldercare are transcended, not viewed as resource depletion, but as profound acts of religious obedience that invite divine blessings (*barakah*). Simultaneously, this devotion integrates with *tarbiyah al-aulad*, as participants utilize their filial duties as an experiential pedagogical framework to model empathy and Islamic moral values (*akhlak*) for their children. Ultimately, these intersecting obligations are transformed from socio-economic hardships into spiritually rewarding, holistic endeavors that fulfill both intergenerational and religious mandates.

3. Manifestation of Islamic Values as Spiritual Coping Mechanisms

To navigate the profound psychological and social pressures inherent in their dual caregiving roles, the participants demonstrated resilience that extends beyond conventional psychological frameworks. Instead, they systematically operationalize specific Islamic educational values, transforming theoretical religious doctrines into highly functional, everyday spiritual coping mechanisms. This transition from passive belief to practical application represents a profound manifestation of "lived religion" that buffers against chronic caregiving fatigue through four primary strategies:

a. Sincerity (*Ikhlas*) as Expectation Management

Sincerity (*Ikhlas*) as Expectation Management: Participants apply *ikhlas* by deliberately detaching their actions from the expectation of human gratitude or reciprocal return. By doing everything purely for the sake of Allah, the emotional burden of feeling "unappreciated" is significantly minimized. Participant 10, a 38-year-old nurse, explained how this mindset prevents emotional burnout:

"Sometimes my elderly mother complains about the food despite everything I do, and my kids can be demanding. If I expect them to keep saying thank you, I will go crazy. Ikhlas means I do this for Allah alone. Whether they appreciate it or not, my reward is securely kept with Him. That mindset instantly removes the heaviness in my chest." — (Participant 10, 38 years old, Nurse)

This narrative illustrates that *ikhlas* is not merely passive religious dogma, but an active mechanism of emotion regulation. By shifting the source of validation from human reciprocity to divine assurance, the participant neutralizes the psychological fatigue of unreciprocated caregiving. This process transforms chronic role strain into long-term emotional and spiritual resilience.

b. Patience (Sabr) as Emotional Regulation and Madrasah Ula

Managing the demanding behavior of elderly parents while simultaneously caring for young children requires high-level emotional regulation. Sabr was consistently cited as the practical tool for pausing, reflecting, and preventing emotional outbursts. Crucially, by actively demonstrating emotional restraint (*sabr*), these working mothers embody their role as the madrasah ula (the first school) for their children, teaching them that Islamic character is built during moments of hardship. Participant 11, a 39-year-old administrative staff member, illustrated how actively practicing patience prevents her from taking her exhaustion out on her children:

"There are moments when my father stubbornly refuses to take his medication and yells at me. Before I learned to truly practice sabr, I would carry that anger into the living room and snap at my children. Now, sabr acts as my emotional firewall. I take a deep breath, separate the issues, and remind myself that my children are observing my reactions." — (Participant 11, 39-year-old, Administrative Staff)

This account demonstrates that *sabr* transcends passive endurance, functioning instead as an active mechanism for affect regulation and emotional compartmentalization. By using spiritual mindfulness as an 'emotional firewall,' the participant disrupts the contagion of stress within the household. This deliberate restraint operationalizes the concept of *madrasah ula*, as the mother transforms acute intergenerational friction into experiential pedagogy, modeling resilience to instill core Islamic virtues (*akhlak*) in her children.

c. Reliance on God (Tawakkul) as Relief from Economic Anxiety

Participants exhibited strong tawakkul to combat chronic anxiety regarding the future, firmly believing in the concept of rizq (divine sustenance). Participant 12, a 40-year-old civil servant, recounted how this belief system carried her through a financial crisis:

"There was a month when we had zero balance. My father suddenly had to undergo surgery, and I had to pay my children's school fees. I did my part by applying for an office cooperative loan, but I surrendered the rest to Allah. Tawakkul means believing that if Allah commands me to care for my parents and children, He will provide the means. Miraculously, a distant relative suddenly paid off an old debt to us." — (Participant 12, 40 years old, Civil Servant).

This narrative suggests that *tawakkul* operates not as passive fatalism, but as an active, dual-process coping strategy. By combining practical problem-solving such as securing a loan with spiritual surrender, the participant attempts to transfer the uncontrollable aspects of economic hardship to divine authority. Consequently, *tawakkul* appears to serve as a crucial psychological buffer, helping to mitigate severe financial anxiety and facilitating sustained resilience amid economic vulnerability.

d. Gratitude (Syukr) as Cognitive Reframing

Instead of focusing on the fatigue, participants actively reframe their mindset through syukr. It shifts the individual's perspective from viewing the dual caregiving roles as a burden to seeing them as a privilege. Participant 13, a 41-year-old HR Manager, explained how counting her blessings radically reshapes her perception:

"Instead of focusing on how exhausted I am, I look around my house and say Alhamdulillah. I have friends who are orphans and miss their parents dearly, or

couples who are spending hundreds of millions trying to have children. I am blessed to have both generations under my roof. Syukr helps me focus on the abundance of love in my house, rather than the scarcity of my energy." — (Participant 13, 41 years old, HR Management).

This account illustrates how *syukr* can function as an active mechanism for cognitive reframing. By redirecting her focus from a deficit mindset (the scarcity of physical energy) toward emotional assets (the abundance of familial love), the participant appears to alter her psychological experience. This deliberate practice of gratitude helps mitigate the risk of the dual caregiving role being internalized as a source of chronic deprivation, instead facilitating a sense of meaning and psychological well-being.

DISCUSSION

1. Interpretation of the Main Findings

a. Role Conflict and Structural Vulnerability

The findings show that working mothers in the sandwich generation experienced interconnected financial, temporal, emotional, and occupational pressures. Simultaneous expenditure on children and aging parents reduced savings, encouraged debt or additional employment, and limited participants' opportunities for rest and career advancement. These experiences are consistent with evidence that sandwich-generation caregivers report greater financial and emotional difficulties, role overload, and employment restrictions than caregivers responsible for only one generation (Lei, L., Leggett, A. N., & Maust, 2023). Indonesian studies similarly identify divided attention, financial insecurity, physical exhaustion, and difficulties balancing employment and family responsibilities among sandwich-generation women (Irawaty, D. K., & Gayatri, 2023). Therefore, the participants' distress should not be interpreted solely as an individual inability to manage time, but as a response to competing caregiving demands and limited structural support.

b. Reinterpreting Caregiving as Amanah

Despite these pressures, participants interpreted caregiving as an *amanah* expressed through *birrul walidain* and *tarbiyah al-aulad*. This meaning-making process did not eliminate material hardship but enabled participants to locate their sacrifices within a religious and moral framework. A recent concept analysis similarly found that Muslim family caregiving is understood as both a religious obligation and a potential source of divine reward, hope, and meaning, while simultaneously remaining physically and emotionally demanding (Setyawati, et.al, 2024). The present study extends this finding by showing how *amanah* was applied to daily financial decisions, physical eldercare, and the moral education of children. Similarly, it explains that Islamic interpretations of the sandwich generation emphasize the simultaneous responsibility to honour and care for aging parents while continuing to nurture and educate children. The study also underlines the importance of moderation, self-care, and support from family and community in fulfilling these responsibilities (Kusumaningrum, 2023b). More broadly, (Rahiem, M. D. H., et. al , 2025) argue that Islamic educational values become a form of *lived religion* when they are translated into repeated family routines and everyday practices of character formation. The present study extends these insights by showing empirically how *amanah* guided participants' daily financial decisions and

physical eldercare, while caregiving practices simultaneously functioned as *tarbiyah bil qudwah*, through which children observed empathy, patience, responsibility, and *birrul walidain*.

c. Islamic Values as Coping and Emotion-Regulation Resources

Participants described *ikhlas*, *sabr*, *tawakkul*, and *syukr* as perceived spiritual resources for managing caregiving pressures. *Ikhlas* helped reduce dependence on interpersonal appreciation, *sabr* supported emotional restraint, *tawakkul* helped participants tolerate uncertainty after practical efforts, and *syukr* redirected attention toward the meaning and affection present in family life. These practices should not be interpreted as automatically preventing burnout. A recent meta-analysis found that the effects of religious coping on psychological outcomes vary with the form of coping and the individual's circumstances; religious coping is more effective when combined with emotion regulation, positive reframing, social support, and practical problem-solving (Cheng, C., & Ying, 2023). Research in the Indonesian Muslim context also found that Islamic religious coping was associated with fewer emotion-regulation difficulties. However, the study emphasized an indirect rather than automatic effect of religious coping on behavioral outcomes (Hafizah, N., & Uyun, 2023). In the present study, Islamic values are thus understood as complementary meaning-making and emotion-regulation resources rather than substitutes for material, interpersonal, psychological, or institutional support.

2. Comparison with Previous Studies

The financial pressure, time scarcity, emotional fatigue, and work–family conflict found in this study are consistent with previous sandwich-generation research (Lei, L., Leggett, A. N., & Maust, 2023), which found that caregivers supporting both older adults and children experienced greater role overload and caregiving-related financial and emotional difficulties. In Indonesia, (Irawaty, D. K., & Gayatri, 2023) similarly reported that women faced physical exhaustion, psychological pressure, and difficulties maintaining employment while supporting two generations. A recent scoping review also identified working hours, workplace flexibility, partner support, and the ability to adapt to changing demands as important factors in work–family conflict among sandwiched caregivers (Honda, A. et.al, 2025).

The present study expands this literature by demonstrating that participants did not experience caregiving solely as a burden or a source of role conflict. They also interpreted it through Islamic educational concepts enacted in everyday family life. This supports research showing that Islamic values can serve as practical foundations for family decisions, interactions, moral conduct, and intergenerational education rather than remaining abstract doctrines (Syamsuni, H. R. et al, 2025). However, religious meaning-making must be interpreted critically. It may help participants regulate emotions and preserve meaning, but it cannot replace income protection, equitable family participation, professional psychological assistance, or formal caregiving support. The mixed findings regarding religious coping also indicate that faith-based strategies should complement, rather than substitute for, other adaptive resources (Cheng, C., & Ying, 2023).

3. Theoretical Contributions

The first theoretical contribution is the conceptualization of Islamic educational values as *lived religion*. Participants enacted religious teachings through ordinary practices such as paying parents' medical expenses, controlling anger, assisting elderly family members, and modeling care for children. Recent scholarship on Indonesian Muslim families similarly argues that religion is lived through repeated family routines and daily interactions rather than confined to formal worship or verbal instruction (Rahiem, M. D. H. et.al., 2025; Syamsuni, H. R. et al, 2025).

Second, the study positions the family as an informal moral curriculum. Children observed compassion, patience, responsibility, and respect through their mothers' treatment of aging parents. Caregiving consequently became an embodied form of *tarbiyah bil qudwah*, in which moral education occurred through example. The study therefore integrates caregiver-stress perspectives with Islamic meaning-making: structural pressures explain the source of participants' difficulties, while Islamic values explain how those difficulties were interpreted and negotiated. This integration does not suggest that spirituality removes caregiver burden; rather, it shows that structural stress and religious meaning coexist in shaping caregiving experiences. Research on Muslim family caregiving likewise identifies both positive meanings such as hope and spiritual reward and negative consequences, including disruption and exhaustion (Setyawati, et.al, 2024). Islamic faith may provide cognitive, emotional, and spiritual resources through which individuals give meaning to stressful experiences and attempt to maintain psychological balance (Şentürk, F. K., & Isikan, 2024).

In conclusion, this study contributes theoretically by demonstrating that Islamic educational values operate as a form of *lived religion* within everyday intergenerational caregiving. The family functions not only as a site of care but also as an informal moral curriculum, where children learn compassion, patience, responsibility, and respect through *tarbiyah bil qudwah*. By integrating caregiver-stress perspectives with Islamic meaning-making, the study shows that structural pressures and religious interpretations coexist in shaping participants' experiences. Islamic values may provide meaning, hope, and emotional resources, but they do not eliminate the financial, physical, and psychological burdens of caregiving.

4. Practical and Pedagogical Implications

The findings support the development of culturally responsive counseling for Muslim families. Counselors may incorporate concepts such as *amanah*, *sabr*, *ikhlas*, *tawakkul*, and *syukr*, while also validating exhaustion, anger, financial anxiety, and the need for assistance. Religious values should not be used to pressure mothers into silently accepting unequal caregiving arrangements. Because religious coping alone does not consistently predict lower psychological distress, faith-sensitive counseling should be combined with emotional-regulation training, problem-solving, social-support mobilization, and referral to professional services when necessary (Cheng, C., & Ying, 2023).

Islamic family education programs should also present *birrul walidain* as a shared family responsibility that involves husbands, siblings, children, and extended family members. Organizations such as *Nasyiatul 'Aisyyah* could provide caregiver-support groups, financial education, respite-care networks, family counseling, and health-service

referrals. At the institutional level, flexible working hours, caregiver leave, flexible work locations, emotional support, and access to caregiving information are among the workplace provisions identified as important for employed caregivers (Honda, A. et.al, 2025). Thus, spiritual and educational interventions should be implemented alongside workplace and social-policy support.

5. Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its qualitative descriptive design, purposive selection of 13 working mothers, and focus on members of one Islamic women's organization in Takalar Regency. Their organizational involvement may have influenced their religious knowledge and the language used to interpret caregiving. The findings provide contextual depth but should not be generalized to all Muslim working mothers. Qualitative descriptive research is intended to produce a detailed, contextually grounded account rather than a statistical representation of a wider population (Villamin, P., et.al. 2025b). Self-reported accounts may also contain socially desirable descriptions of patience, sincerity, and filial devotion. Future studies should involve fathers, spouses, elderly parents, unmarried caregivers, participants from different socioeconomic groups, and women outside religious organizations. Comparative and longitudinal research is also needed to examine how caregiving pressures and religious meaning-making change over time.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that while the sandwich generation experiences significant structural vulnerabilities and role conflicts, Muslim working mothers draw upon Islamic spirituality as a meaningful resource to help them manage caregiver stress and navigate competing caregiving responsibilities. Through cognitive reconstruction, participants reframe their dual caregiving burden as a divine trust (*Amanah*), allowing them to interpret domestic challenges as part of their spiritual commitment through *Birrul Walidain* and *Tarbiyah al-Aulad*. Theoretically, this study contributes to the sociology of family and caregiving by providing qualitative insights into how Islamic coping mechanisms may function as active meaning-making and emotion-regulation strategies that shape caregivers' experiences, rather than merely reflecting passive acceptance or fatalism. Pedagogically, the findings highlight the role of *Tarbiyah al-Aulad* as a form of family-based moral education, in which caregiving practices provide a context for transmitting ethical values, responsibility, compassion, and the formation of religious character across generations. However, this study is limited by its qualitative design and the specific experiences of the participants, which may not fully capture the diverse realities of Muslim working mothers across different social, cultural, and economic contexts. Future research could expand these findings through comparative studies across different communities, longitudinal approaches examining changes in caregiving experiences over time, or studies involving larger and more diverse participant groups. Practically, these findings suggest that support for the sandwich generation in Muslim-majority contexts should incorporate culturally relevant faith-based counseling and spiritual resources alongside broader structural interventions, such as workplace flexibility, social support systems, and caregiving policies, recognizing that spiritual resilience can support caregivers but cannot replace the need for adequate social and institutional support.

Acknowledgments

Give credit to funding bodies and departments that have been of help during the project, for instance by providing financial support.

Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

The authors would like to express their deepest gratitude to the participants in this study, members of the sandwich generation, who generously shared their lived experiences, time, and insights. We also extend our appreciation to STAI YAPIS Takalar for providing the institutional support necessary to conduct this research.

Funding Statement

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data Availability Statement

Clearly describe the availability of the data generated and/or analyzed in this study. Indicate whether due to the highly sensitive nature of the qualitative interviews and strict ethical requirements to protect participant confidentiality and absolute anonymity, the datasets (interview transcripts) generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available. De-identified and aggregated data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to ethical approval.

Declaration of Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Grammarly and ChatGPT 5.5 solely for language editing (grammar, clarity, and readability). The authors reviewed, revised, and verified the final text and take full responsibility for the publication's content.

Additional Information

Correspondence and requests regarding research materials should be addressed to: imel.putri81@gmail.com

[Imel Putri Dewita]  <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2866-5572>

[Goestina]  <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0928-6041>

REFERENCES

- Cheng, C., & Ying, W. (2023). A meta-analytic review of the associations between dimensions of religious coping and psychological symptoms during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 14. <https://doi.org/doi:10.3389/fpsy.2023.1097598>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2024). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (5th ed). CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Hafizah, N., & Uyun, Q. (2023). Examining how Islamic coping reduces internet misuse through emotional self-regulation. *Journal An-Nafs: Kajian Penelitian Psikologi*, 8(2), 264–277. <https://doi.org/doi:10.33367/psi.v8i2.4310>
- Honda, A., Ono, M., Nishida, T., & Honda, S. (2025). Balancing and conflict between work and family life of sandwiched caregivers: A scoping review. *Safety and Health at Work*, 16(2), 156–163. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1016/j.shaw.2025.04.004>
- Ikhsan, K. M. A. F. (2025). Navigating family responsibilities: A maqāṣid sharia framework for the sandwich generation. *Jurnal Al-Hakim Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Studi Syariah Hukum Dan Filantropi*, 23–38. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22515/jurnalalhakim.v7i1.11271>
- Irawaty, D. K., & Gayatri, M. (2023). Sensing the squeeze of sandwich generation women in Jakarta, Indonesia. *Journal of Family Sciences*, 8(1), 52–69. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.29244/jfs.v8i1.43942>
- Kautsar, F. M., Irvanianto, S. A., Agustin, D. T., & Lestari, A. D. (2025). The sandwich generation: Family responsibilities and individual well-being. *Journal of World Science*, 4(7), 929–938. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.58344/jws.v4i7.1449>

- Kussanti, D. P., El Hidayah, N. I., Al-Paksi, Y. F., Bakiyah, H., & Sartika, R. (2025). Sandwich generation strategies in caring for parents and themselves. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 13(3), 124–132. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v13i3.7356>
- Kusumaningrum, F. A. (2023a). The meaning of verses on parents-children relationship as basis for sandwich generation concept in Islam. *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*, 553–582. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol22.iss2.art10>
- Kusumaningrum, F. A. (2023b). *The meaning of verses on parents-children relationship as basis for sandwich generation concept in Islam. Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*. 22(2), 553–582. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol22.iss2.art10>
- Lei, L., Leggett, A. N., & Maust, D. T. (2023). A national profile of sandwich generation caregivers providing care to both older adults and children. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 71(3), 799–809. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1111/jgs.18138>
- Nasith, A. (2023). Sandwich generation: Sociological dynamics in the traditions of Madura society from an Islamic perspective. *FALASIFA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 14(2), 126–138. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.62097/falasifa.v14i2.1485>
- Rahiem, M. D. H., Abdullah, N. S. M., Pranawati, R., Khoirudin, A., & Mualimin, E. (2025). Lived religion and daily routines: Reading Indonesia's "Seven Habits of Great Children" in Muslim family life. *Jurnal Indo-Islamika*, 15(2), 230–243. <https://doi.org/doi:10.15408/jii.v15i2.48883>
- Rosemalla, E., & Wahida, N. A. (2024). Analysis connection spiritual aspects with quality levels life elderly Regency Gorontalo. *International Journal of Public Health*, 1(1), 12–22. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.62951/ijph.v1i1.7>
- Safitri, D. (2025). Resilience in the sandwich generation: Islamic family law perspectives on coping with dual responsibilities. *Jurnal MEDIASAS: Media Ilmu Syari'ah Dan Ahwal Al-Syakhsiyyah*, 8(3), 624–635. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.58824/mediasas.v8i3.434>
- Salamuddin, A., Fahrudin, F., & Rahmat, M. (2024). Transfiguration of the sandwich generation concept in Islam. *Proceeding ISETH (International Summit on Science Technology and Humanity)*, 2891–2895. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.23917/iseth.5444>
- Şentürk, F. K., & Isikan, S. (2024). Islamic faith as a source of coping with work stress. *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 62(1), 65–90. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2024.621.65-90>
- Setyawati, M. B., Parsons, A. P. J., Laing, B., Lynch, A., Habiburahman, I. L., & Izza, F. N. (2024). The family caregiving: A Rogerian concept analysis of Muslim perspective and Islamic sources. *Heliyon*, 10(3), e25415. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e25415>
- Sudarji, S., Panggabean, H., & Marta, R. F. (2022). Challenges of the sandwich generation: Stress and coping strategy of the multigenerational care. *Indigenous: Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi*, 7(3), 263–275. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.23917/indigenous.v7i3.19433>
- Sulintang, A., Saragih, T. S., Pramasanti, A. N., Mahaganti, F. S., Fitriani, K., Augustin, E. Putra, M. A., & Kara, S. B. (2024). Bibliometric analysis of Indonesia's labor dynamics: Future works, digital transformations, and contemporary employment landscape shifts. *International Journal of Data and Network Science*, 8(2), 679–688. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5267/j.ijdns.2024.1.010>
- Syamsuni, H. R., Rahman, A., Wan Draman, W. M. A. A., Syamsiah, N., & Asykur, M. (2025). Integrating the values of Islamic religious education in the daily lives of rural families: A gender study. *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, 15(1), 57–83. <https://doi.org/doi:10.18326/ijims.v15i1.57-83>
- Villamin, P., Lopez, V., Thapa, D. K., & Cleary, M. (2025a). A worked example of qualitative descriptive design: A step-by-step guide for novice and early career researchers. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 81(8), 5181–5195. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.16481>
- Villamin, P., Lopez, V., Thapa, D. K., & Cleary, M. (2025b). A worked example of qualitative descriptive design: A step-by-step guide for novice and early career researchers. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 81(8), 5181–5195. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1111/jan.16481>