



Indigenous Community: A Phenomenological Study of Psychological Well-being Among Serat Menyuri Practitioners in the Kalitanjung Community

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Abstract

This study examines the psychological well-being of the Kalitanjung indigenous community, a Kejawen (Javanese spirituality) group that adheres to the Serat Menyuri teachings. Qualitative phenomenological approach involving three respondents who are practitioners of the Serat Menyuri teachings. Data were collected through focus group discussions, supplemented by literature reviews and documentation. Data analysis was conducted using thematic methods, supported by Quirkos software. The results show that the psychological well-being of this community isn't rooted in individuality, but rather in a deep sense of connectedness and communal awareness as the foundation for the emergence of psychological well-being. Aspects of psychological well-being are manifested through strong social cohesion so that autonomy is understood as the ability to build social networks, and environmental mastery is reflected in the structured distribution of roles. Interpersonal relationships are built on trust and openness, while environmental mastery is associated with a shared mindset to seek peace in old age. Life goals and personal growth are collective, focused on preserving traditions and emotional support among members. Novelty from this study about social cohesion, structured roles, and collective goals forms the main foundations that enable this community to remain resilient, both psychologically and as the foundation of Islamic counseling.

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INTRODUCTION

Research in the field of indigenous counseling has begun to proliferate in Indonesia. This trend is driven by the vast number of cultures that possess the potential to be developed as methods for intervening in individual psychological health issues. One of the themes frequently addressed in these studies is the psychological well-being of indigenous communities (Jamaliha et al., 2025; Jayanti & Suarya, 2018; Sari & Relawaty, 2025). The psychological well-being and existence of indigenous peoples face various challenges in maintaining their survival due to multiple threats across social, economic, environmental, and cultural aspects (Sangha et al., 2020; Sithole et al., 2023).

Psychological well-being is a crucial aspect of life that is closely interrelated with an individual's life satisfaction. Research has shown that there is a positive relationship between psychological well-being and other psychological aspects such as resilience, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and self-concept (Lewin & Stier, 2025; Padmanabhanunni et al., 2023; Rehman et al., 2023; Torppa et al., 2024). Indigenous communities inherently possess very strong social cohesiveness (Hidalgo et al., 2024; Tsegaye, 2025). However, this cohesiveness is now vulnerable to erosion by the dynamics of modern life, which have the potential to shift their collective mindset toward a more individualistic one (Banwo, 2023; Singh-Peterson, 2023).

The dominant research paradigm to date has been oriented toward the dynamics of Western society, which focuses on individualism. The gap from phenomena that view the individual as an entity separate from their environment. This differs significantly from the dynamics of indigenous communities, which tend to live within a paradigm of life harmony (Hosseini, 2023; Li et al., 2023). In this view, the individual can't be separated from either their physical or spiritual environment. This perspective of harmony also influences how indigenous communities understand health, where the physical state aligns with and mutually influences psychological and spiritual conditions (Celidwen & Keltner, 2023; Quigley et al., 2022).

Despite the abundance of research on psychological well-being, studies specifically examining the dynamics of Indigenous communities remain very limited. This is due to the challenges in accessing the dynamics of indigenous societies, which are more varied compared to the general society. One indigenous community that still exists and strives to maintain its existence is the Kalitang Indigenous Community. The Kalitang Indigenous Community practices the teachings found in the *Serat Menyuri*. The *Serat Menyuri* contains life teachings that are recited at specific times, particularly during funeral ceremonies within the indigenous community (Nazila et al., 2023). The term "Serat Menyuri" is derived from the words "sunyo ruri," which mean "toward eternal silence." This community has existed since ancient times; in fact, they perceive themselves as "older" than other cultures in the region, such as the Aboge community in Jatilawang.

Research specifically examining the Kalitang community is also highly limited. Based on a search of Google Scholar, there are only a few studies regarding the dynamics of the Kalitang people. These studies have primarily explored aspects of

religiosity, cultural preservation such as folklore, the instillation of linguistic values, and ecological conservation (Nurlekha, 2014; Oktaviana, 2024; Resticka et al., 2024; Zubaedah et al., 2023). This indicates that research focusing on the theme of psychological well-being hasn't yet been conducted.

The psychological well-being of indigenous communities challenges Western universalism and proves that tradition isn't merely a legacy of the past. Through bonds with nature, spirituality, and a sense of collectivity, Indigenous communities utilize these values as adaptive psychological resources. This study asserts that the documentation of intergenerational tradition isn't just a survival effort but clear evidence that their collective identity remains relevant and resilient in the face of changing times. Furthermore, this research contributes to the relationship between human psychological well-being and environmental existence, as ecosystem degradation directly affects the psychological and spiritual well-being of indigenous communities (Hernández-Blanco et al., 2022; Lawrance et al., 2022; Maharja et al., 2023). Thus, this study isn't merely an academic analysis but an essential source in documenting the existence of a culture.

METHOD

This study is qualitative phenomenological research involving three practitioners of the Serat Menyuri teachings, consisting of two men and one woman. The selection of research subjects was based on the guidance of the community members within the Serat Menyuri environment. Following this guidance, the researchers contacted local elders to gather information for this subject research with purposive sampling. The data collection process was conducted through focus group discussions with the Kalitanjung community. The questions posed referred to the aspects of psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Credibility was established through data triangulation by integrating multiple sources, including focus group discussions, literature reviews, and relevant documentation. In addition, member checking was conducted by returning the preliminary findings to participants to verify the accuracy and resonance of the interpretations with their lived experiences. Data analysis was performed qualitatively using thematic analysis through six phases supported by the Quirkos software in Figure 1. To strengthen the qualitative findings, this study also incorporated literature reviews and documentation.

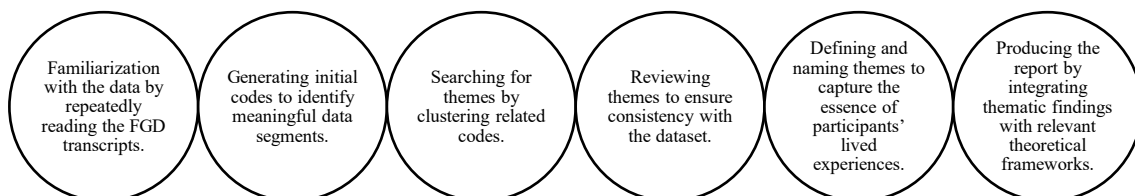


Figure 1. Thematic Analysis Stages with Focus Group Discussions with The Kalitanjung Community

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aspects proposed by Ryan and Deci (2001) served as the basis for the questions posed to the three respondents. Based on the inquiries regarding these aspects, the results of this study are as follows:

Autonomy is perceived as an individual's ability to build social networks. In this study, this ability is acquired through experience, as the subjects have been part of the environment since birth. The long-standing interaction between the research subjects and their surrounding environment allows them to develop proficient social skills. This is formed through routine activities that unite community elements in the practice of *Serat Menyuri*. Furthermore, there is a collective awareness that joining this community can't be done instantaneously; rather, one must reach an age considered sufficient (mature or elderly). This was revealed in the interview results:

"...if you join the sepuhan ceremony, you have to be sixty years old. You can't just do it. Oh, it's been forbidden for a long time." (WN1).

In line with this, other respondents also stated that there is a realization at the age of 60 to join the existing indigenous community.

"You see, when people here reach 55, they start helping out. That's why there's a Kasinoman group, even though its members are quite old. They help out first. Then, when they're 60, they officially join." (WN2).

In terms of competence, practitioners of the *Serat Menyuri* teachings have their respective roles. Some are assigned to recite the *Serat Menyuri* at predetermined times, such as the third, seventh, hundredth, and thousandth days following a death. Members who aren't on duty will listen attentively and apply the teachings in their daily lives. For the adherents of these teachings, being requested to recite the *serat* is considered a great honor, as not all members are capable of reciting it proficiently:

"...Yes, if you are appointed to read the Serat, it is an honor." (WN2)

Within the *Serat Menyuri* practitioner community, there is a clear division of tasks concerning competence and roles. Members with specialized skills are appointed to recite the *Serat Menyuri* at significant intervals following a death (the 3rd, 7th, 100th, and 1,000th days). This recitation task is regarded as a prestigious honor, as not all community members have mastered the proper recitation of the *serat*. Meanwhile, other members who don't serve as reciters focus on listening to and implementing the teachings in their daily lives.

Trust in others is one of the pillars of the *Serat Menyuri* practitioner community. They realize that in order to continuously maintain the preservation of their surrounding environment, members must place mutual trust in one another. Furthermore, openness toward the outside world is a way to sustain the existence of the *Serat Menyuri* practitioners. This is reflected in the respondent's statement:

"Every certain day there's an event. It's fun because it's a gathering, a serawung (recitation) among members" (WN1).

"The Serat Menyuri is read when someone dies. The reading begins the afternoon of the death, then [people] gather the next morning or afternoon, and then the Serat is read that night" (WN2).

Relationships with others are built upon the established customs of the surrounding environment. Helping and comforting those in distress is an inseparable part of life within this *kesepuhan*/ seniority (elder-led) community. Moreover, *Serat Menyuri* is regarded as a life philosophy that guides individuals from birth until death:

"Serat Menyuri teaches about the journey of life, from before birth, to non-existence, death/the afterlife" (WN2).

In addition to relations with others, family support is also a reason why group members continue to remain active in the existing activities.

"...As a wife, I support your activities" (WN3).

In line with the aforementioned respondent, other respondents also indicated that family support is indeed present.

"...my family is very supportive, bro..." WN2).

Overall, the social life of this community is sustained by the tradition of mutual assistance during times of hardship, which is further strengthened by routine social interactions (*serawung*) and the practice of reciting *Serat Menyuri* during funeral ceremonies. In addition to communal bonds, full support from the family serves as a vital pillar that enables group members to remain active and maintain the community's existence.

Environmental mastery serves as a crucial factor in examining the psychological well-being of *Serat Menyuri* practitioners. In this context, the capacity for environmental mastery is rooted in a shared mindset that old age is the appropriate time to join this community; consequently, it is locally recognized as a *kesepuhan* (elder-led) community. Furthermore, the sense of joy derived from joining the group fosters a feeling of comfort throughout the activities.

"...If you get used to it, I think you'll really enjoy it. Incidentally, I've already mastered all of it even though I've only been doing it for two years..." (WN 3).

The routine and organized use of community facilities (the *Pendopo*) for various activities demonstrates the ability to effectively manage and master the communal environment.

"...You saw the pavilion area earlier, right? That area over there is often used for

special events. It seems like every time there's a big event, including that one, it's often held there... (WN 3)".

Among the life purposes to be achieved by joining this community are harmony and the preservation of teachings or traditions that have existed for hundreds of years. In fact, based on interviews, the Kalitanjung community is considered older than the Bonokeling community located in the Jatilawang area, Banyumas.

"... The reason why you want to join this? Actually, to preserve this. The older people, these are already (mastering this... (WN 1).

Furthermore, the purpose of joining this community is to follow the established teachings. This is because the *Serat Menyuri* imparts guidance on life, spanning from before one's existence until death.

"Serat Menyuri teaches from non-existence to non-existence until death..." (WN 2).

Personal growth is evident in the realization that, as individuals age, they increasingly seek tranquility by joining a community. Being part of a community with peers of a similar age group creates a psychologically supportive impact through mutual encouragement.

"Besides preserving, what do we want to get from studying Serat Menyuri? Besides preserving, so that we can be happy, joyful..." (WN1).

"If you are appointed to read Serat Menyuri, it is an honor..." (WN2).

The practice of these teachings is expected to generate feelings of pleasure and joy (positive affect). This is the result of a process of internalization and self-development through tradition. Viewing one's role or duty within the tradition as an honor motivates individuals to learn and grow within that role, thereby supporting personal growth. Overall, the pattern of psychological well-being in the Kalitanjung indigenous community is illustrated in Table 1.

The results of the study indicate that this community exhibits various social dynamics occurring through a long-term process, stemming from the extended period individuals have resided in that environment. Viewed from Paul A. Bell's perspective on perception, this long-term process experienced by individuals within the group is caused by stimuli that are exceptionally strong and enduring, thereby forming a sustainable and continuous equilibrium (Allsop et al., 2025; Coffman, 2020). Furthermore, continuous collective routines serve as stimuli that strengthen cohesiveness among members while acting as a medium for the intergenerational transmission of existing values (Akbar & Ansori, 2024; Alwi et al., 2025). As human beings, the Kalitanjung indigenous people require a physical space that provides identity and a sense of security. This space isn't merely a location but a means of social communication. Within the Kalitanjung

community, this communication space is reflected in the traditional dynamics and routine gatherings during funeral ceremonies and other customary rituals (Nazila et al., 2023; Resticka et al., 2024; Saputra & Hidayah, 2022).

Table 1. Dynamics of Psychological Well-being in the Kalitanjung Indigenous Community

Dimensions of Psychological Well-being	Manifestations in the Kalitanjung Community	Core Values Contained
Autonomy	Ability to build social networks and the conscious decision to join the community at a mature age (60 years).	Voluntariness & Maturity
Competence	Structured division of roles (reciters of <i>Serat</i> vs. practitioners); pride in the assigned roles.	Honor & Responsibility
Positive Relations	Culture of <i>serawung</i> (interaction), mutual trust, and full support from the family.	Social Cohesion & Trust
Environmental Mastery	Utilization of communal facilities (<i>Pendopo</i>) and alignment with the "kesepuhan" mindset.	Communal Management
Purpose in Life	Preserving ancient traditions and following life path guidance from birth until death.	Cultural & Spiritual Preservation
Personal Growth	Seeking tranquility in old age through the internalization of <i>tembang</i> (chants) and positive affect (joy/happiness).	Inner Peace & Harmony

The phenomena within the Kalitanjung Indigenous Community differ from the Western cultural context, which views psychological well-being as originating from individualistic values (Humphrey & Bliuc, 2021). Moreover, the harmony of life between humans, the environment, and God in the Kalitanjung community serves as a distinguishing factor from Western culture, which emphasizes liberal aspects, rationality, and individuality in behavior (Abramov & Peixoto, 2022; Aziz & Anjum, 2025; Liu & Liu, 2025).

Regarding the aspect of competence, the clear division of roles among community members indicates that not all members are able to recite the *Serat Menyuri* according to the established rules. Only a few can recite this *Serat* because it is written in Javanese script and language. From a structuralist philosophical perspective, this division of roles shows a healthy social dynamic characterized by clear societal functions (Fatima, 2023; Ferreirós, 2023). This task distribution ensures that each community member has their respective role, resulting in mutual support and collaboration to preserve the teachings within the *Serat Menyuri*.

Relationships among members are built upon the pillars of trust and openness. Trust serves as the foundation for internal cohesion, while an open attitude toward the outside world is an adaptive strategy to maintain the community's existence amid changing times. This cohesion is viewed as the attachment or strength of social relationships (Hong et al., 2023; Vanzella-Yang & Abrutyn, 2022). On the other hand, environmental mastery in this community is unique because it is age-based, where members generally join in their old age, thus becoming known as a "kesepuhan community." This shared life stage creates psychological alignment and comfort for

individuals joining a community (Adegoke & Alvarez, 2025; Duggan et al., 2025).

The collective purpose in life is to preserve centuries-old traditions. This becomes a source of existential meaning, particularly for the elderly seeking identity stability. Individual existentialism is viewed as a way for individuals to feel present within the dynamics of life (Binder, 2024; Shahar, 2022). One available choice is joining a community in old age. Meanwhile, members' personal growth is reflected in their awareness to seek tranquility in their later years through the community. Psychological support arises from the shared life experiences of its members, who provide mutual emotional reinforcement. While effective for the well-being of the elderly, this support model is homogeneous, and the acceptance of life conditions is this community's answer to maintaining psychological well-being.

Islamic cultural counseling policies in Serat Menyuri practice strengthen psychological well-being based on local wisdom, especially for the elderly with routine interactions, shared values, and collective meaning of life. Academically, this study critiques the dominance of Western perspectives that tend to be individualistic in interpreting psychological well-being based on the new Islamic culture that emphasizes communal, spiritual, and harmonious dimensions. Future research directions are suggested to expand the context of Islamic cultural counseling studies in various indigenous communities through a psychological well-being model. Future studies' exploration of Islamic culturally counseling based well-being models. Because the novelty of this research lies in its integration of indigenous spiritual traditions (Serat Menyuri) with the psychological well-being framework, offering a non-Western, communal, and spiritually grounded perspective that emphasizes harmony between individuals, community, and transcendental values.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study conclude that the psychological well-being of the Kalitanjung Indigenous Community is deeply interconnected with and influenced by strong social cohesion and the preservation of collective traditions within the surrounding social environment. Overall, the psychological well-being of the Kalitanjung Indigenous Community is achieved through profound community engagement rather than through individuality grounded in maturity, competence through structured roles, strong relational bonds, age-based environmental mastery, life purpose centered on cultural preservation, and personal growth through inner peace and shared meaning. Social cohesion, structured roles, collective life purposes, and emotional support from fellow members constitute the primary foundation that enables a sense of well-being and resilience in facing the dynamics of modern life. The study is limited by its small sample size, and future research is recommended to expand participant diversity. However, the novelty of this research lies in its integration of indigenous spiritual traditions (Serat Menyuri) with the psychological well-being framework, offering a non-Western, communal, and spiritually grounded perspective that emphasizes harmony between individuals, community, and

transcendental values. Future studies' exploration of Islamic culturally counseling based well-being models.

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