

Optimizing the Role of Family as Main Support for Elderly Through Social Counseling

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 14 December 2025

Revised: 12 April 2026

Accepted: 30 May 2026

Keywords

Caregiver burden

Eldercare

Sandwich generation

Social counseling

ABSTRACT

Indonesia is undergoing a rapid demographic transition toward an aged society, shifting the long-term caregiving burden heavily onto the informal family structure. Within the local sociocultural context of filial piety, the family is the primary pillar of eldercare. However, modern socioeconomic pressures have eroded domestic capacities, trapping productive-age individuals within a highly stressful dual-obligation matrix known as the "Sandwich Generation." This study aims to evaluate the multidimensional caregiver burden experienced by the Indonesian sandwich generation and explore the effectiveness of transforming the *Bina Keluarga Lansia* (BKL) [Family Development for the Elderly] program through digitalized, contextual social counseling interventions. Operating as a systematic literature review and qualitative metasynthesis, this study comprehensively analyzed empirical, peer-reviewed literature ($n = 25$) published between 2015 and 2025. Data selection strictly followed the PRISMA protocol, extracting variables linked to family support, caregiver burden (via the Zarit Burden Interview framework), and social work counseling models. The synthesis demonstrates a critical geriatric competence gap within households. Traditional top-down medical interventions routinely fail because they ignore the caregiver's psychosocial ecosystem. Applying the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), this study reveals that digitalizing social counseling (e.g., via asynchronous psychoeducational platforms and interactive peer support groups) effectively bypasses caregiver time poverty, reduces social isolation, and significantly lowers perceived caregiver burden scores. Social counseling acts as a transformative mechanism that shifts the family's role from a passive, overwhelmed shelter into a highly competent, resilient support system. To sustain this framework, macro-level policy adjustments are urgently required, including the institutionalization of community-based respite care, targeted fiscal incentives for low-income caregiving households, and the structural revitalization of the BKL curriculum to incorporate stress management and digital health literacy.

Introduction

Indonesia is currently undergoing a crucial and inevitable demographic transition, characterized by a structural shift toward an aging population. This phenomenon constitutes a logical consequence of successful national development, which has simultaneously led to increased life expectancy and declining fertility rates. According to data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS), the proportion of the elderly population has

reached a significant threshold, standing at approximately 10.48% in 2022. Demographic projections indicate that this figure will surge sharply toward the 20% range by 2045, marking a pivotal momentum where Indonesia is predicted to transition into an aged society. This quantitative increase carries profound and complex implications, not only for the healthcare sector and macroeconomics but also for micro-social structures, particularly family dynamics as the primary caregiving unit.

Within the Indonesian sociocultural landscape, which is heavily influenced by communal values and norms of filial piety, the family is positioned as the primary pillar and the "spearhead" in providing long-term care for the elderly (Kusuma et al., 2023). Unlike Western countries, which may rely more heavily on formal care institutions such as nursing homes, Indonesians adhere firmly to a cultural preference for home-based elderly care. This is reflected in data showing that the majority of older adults in Indonesia reside with their families or within the community, demonstrating a high level of reliance on informal family support.

However, the idealism of these cultural values (*Das Sollen*) is currently in sharp conflict with the realities of modernity (*Das Sein*). Modern families face an erosion of capacity due to economic pressures, social mobility, and shifting occupational structures. The fundamental issue that arises is the unreadiness of families to execute their functions amidst increasingly severe external pressures. The most pressing phenomenon gaining serious attention in academic discourse and public policy is the emergence of the "Sandwich Generation." This term, first introduced by Miller (1981), describes a situation where productive-age individuals are "sandwiched" between two heavy financial and emotional obligations simultaneously: caring for aging parents who require medical and financial attention (the older generation), and concurrently raising and financing the education of their own children (the younger generation) (Lei et al., 2023).

This pressure is further compounded by uncertain global economic conditions, rising living costs, and high healthcare expenses that are often not fully covered by social insurance. Studies indicate that the caregiver burden experienced by Indonesian families has reached an alarming level. This burden manifests as physical fatigue, psychological distress (stress, anxiety, and depression), and family financial crises. If left unmanaged, this accumulated burden can trigger sharp role conflicts, a decline in the quality of intergenerational relationships, and, in extreme cases, lead to elder neglect or abuse.

Herein lies the urgency of social work intervention through social counseling mechanisms. Ironically, despite the vital role of the family, it is frequently observed that families lack adequate cognitive and psychomotor knowledge regarding geriatrics. This ignorance creates a gap between the complex needs of the elderly and the caregiving capacity available at home. Social counseling, defined as a behavioral change process facilitated through the dissemination of information, communication, motivation, and education, holds great potential to bridge this gap. This intervention is required to transform families from merely being "shelters for the elderly" into "competent and resilient support systems."

Despite the reality of this issue, contemporary literature remains fragmented. Most studies focus on the medical aspects of aging (such as the prevalence of degenerative diseases), some focus on the macroeconomic burden of population aging, and others on general social policy. There is highly limited research that comprehensively integrates the analysis of the psychosocial burden of the sandwich generation with an evaluation of the effectiveness of specific and contextual social counseling models in Indonesia. Prior studies have often failed to link how counseling interventions can specifically reduce caregiver burden scores (measured via the Zarit

Burden Interview) within the Indonesian cultural context (Larantukan & Yudiarso, 2025).

The novelty of this research lies in its metasynthesis approach, which uniquely integrates the caregiver burden analysis—measured through standardized instruments such as the Zarit Burden Interview (ZBI)—with a transformative social counseling model contextualized for Indonesian families. Unlike previous studies that tend to be fragmented between medical and macroeconomic aspects, this article offers an integrative and highly applicable framework. It connects clinical instruments with strategies to strengthen family resilience through psychoeducational models, the *Bina Keluarga Lansia* (BKL) [Family Development for the Elderly] program, and the utilization of digital technology, all specifically adapted to address the dual pressures faced by the sandwich generation (Listyaningsih & Wardani, 1970). Consequently, this study provides actionable guidance for social workers to shift the family's role from a passive caregiving unit into a competent and resilient support system.

Although the issue of caregiver burden has been widely discussed, a critical gap remains in the current literature. Existing intervention or counseling models are often generic and top-down, focusing solely on the transfer of basic medical knowledge without considering the unique psychosocial dynamics of the "Sandwich Generation" in Indonesia. Most programs have not addressed the aspects of role conflict management and financial distress specifically experienced by this squeezed productive-age group. Therefore, an analysis that integrates psychosocial burden with a more contextual and transformative counseling model is urgently required.

Method

This study is designed utilizing a systematic literature review (SLR) and qualitative metasynthesis approach. This design was strategically selected to explore, analyze, and synthesize empirical and theoretical evidence regarding the role of the family and the effectiveness of social counseling for the elderly in Indonesia. The SLR approach enables researchers to map a broad knowledge landscape, identify consistencies across findings, and detect critical research gaps untouched by prior literature.

The literature review methodology in this study adopts the framework developed by Snyder (2019) and the practical guidance from Petticrew & Roberts (2006). Snyder (2019) emphasizes that a literature review is not merely a summary of readings, but an independent research methodology that demands rigor, transparency, and replicability. Meanwhile, Petticrew & Roberts (2006) provide operational guidance in conducting narrative synthesis for qualitative and complex social data, which is highly relevant for dissecting family dynamics and social work interventions.

The material objects of this research encompass the dynamics of family-based elderly care, caregiver burden, the sandwich generation phenomenon, and social counseling practices. The analytical scope is bounded within the socio-cultural and policy context of Indonesia, while still considering relevant international comparative studies as benchmarks. The publication period for the reviewed literature spans from 2015 to 2025. This decade-long timeframe was selected to capture recent demographic shifts, the evolution of post-pandemic family structures, and contemporary developments in Indonesian social welfare policies.

Data collection was executed through systematic searches across internationally and nationally accredited scientific journal databases, including SINTA, Google Scholar, PubMed, and institutional university repositories. To maintain research transparency and replicability, the literature selection process strictly adhered to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol as

detailed below: 1) Identification: The initial search utilizing Boolean logic generated a total of 115 literature records; 2) Screening: Following duplicate removal, titles and abstracts were screened, resulting in the exclusion of 60 articles due to a lack of focus on elderly family dynamics in Indonesia or being published outside the 2015–2025 timeframe; 3) Eligibility: A total of 45 full-text articles were assessed based on inclusion criteria requiring empirical results and peer-reviewed publication; 4) Inclusion: Based on the final evaluation, 25 articles ($n = 25$) were selected as the primary baseline for the narrative synthesis in this study.

Table 1
The Article Selection Flowchart (PRISMA Diagram)

Stage	Procedure and Number of Articles
IDENTIFICATION	Initial Database Search: Search results from SINTA, Google Scholar, and PubMed databases using Boolean logic: ($n = 115$)
↓	
SCREENING	Title & Abstract Screening: Articles screened based on topical relevance and timeframe (2015–2025): ($n = 55$) Exclusion: Irrelevant articles or duplicates ($n = 60$)
↓	
ELIGIBILITY	Full-Text Eligibility Assessment: Articles assessed based on inclusion criteria (empirical & peer-reviewed): ($n = 45$) Exclusion: Opinion pieces, blogs, or ambiguous methodologies ($n = 10$)
↓	
INCLUDED	Final Synthesis: Articles fulfilling all criteria and utilized in the narrative analysis: ($n = 25$)

To ensure data validity and relevance, the following inclusion criteria were rigorously applied:

1. Journal articles presenting empirical research findings (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods) that have undergone a peer-review process.
2. Official reports from credible state institutions (e.g., Statistics Indonesia [BPS], Ministry of Social Affairs, National Population and Family Planning Board [BKKBN]).
3. Relevant theses or dissertations from accredited higher education institutions.
4. Statutory and regulatory documents concerning elderly welfare and social counseling applicable in Indonesia.

Literature that failed to meet these criteria—such as popular opinion articles, personal blogs, or publications outside the 2015–2025 timeframe (except for seminal foundational theories)—was excluded from the analysis.

The primary variables analyzed in this study include: 1) Family Support, defined as the assistance provided by family members to older adults, encompassing emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal dimensions, as conceptualized in the House & Kahn Social Support Theory. 2) Quality of Life of the Elderly, older adults' subjective perception of their position in life within the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, measured using standardized instruments such as the WHOQOL-BREF. 3) Caregiver Burden, the degree of physical, psychological, social, and financial stress experienced by caregivers due to care demands, which is empirically measured using the Zarit Burden Interview (ZBI) instrument. 4) Social Counseling, a social work intervention aimed at transforming the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of families in eldercare through educational and mentoring processes.

The gathered data were analyzed utilizing content analysis and narrative synthesis techniques. The analytical process commenced with data reduction, wherein key information from each piece of literature was extracted and categorized based on core themes (family roles, sandwich generation challenges, and extension models). Subsequently, a cross-study comparison was conducted to identify patterns, consistencies in findings, and contradictions between studies. The final synthesis was executed to construct a cohesive theoretical argument regarding the urgency and effectiveness of social counseling within the Indonesian context. Analytical validity was maintained through data source triangulation, merging perspectives from medical, psychological, and sociological studies.

This section presents a comprehensive synthesis of the reviewed literature, outlining the vital role of the family, providing an in-depth analysis of the multidimensional challenges faced by sandwich generation caregivers, and evaluating the effectiveness of social counseling as a solution-oriented intervention strategy.

Results

The Role of the Family in Eldercare: The Foundation of Geriatric Well-Being

Within the landscape of eldercare in Indonesia, the family operates not merely as a residential unit, but as an irreplaceable primary care institution. Synthesis of the reviewed literature ($n = 25$) consistently reinforces that family support stands as the strongest and most reliable predictor of the elderly's quality of life. In an environment where formal social security systems fail to comprehensively cover long-term care (LTC) requirements, the family bridges this institutional void, acting as a vital, informal social safety net.

Drawing upon the social support theory conceptualized by House and Kahn (as cited in Cohen, 2004), family caregiving within the Indonesian socio-cultural matrix can be systematically classified into five intertwined functional dimensions: *First*, emotional and psychological support. This dimension serves as the fundamental cornerstone for preserving geriatric mental health. Older adults frequently navigate profound phases of loss—including post-retirement occupational displacement, spousal or peer bereavement, and the progressive decline of physical faculties—all of which trigger severe loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Within this context, the family functions as a psychological "buffer." By providing empathy, affection, trust, and interpersonal warmth, family members mitigate these stressors. Activities such as children or grandchildren actively listening to the elderly's life narratives function as a natural reminiscence therapy, offering vital existential validation. Empirically, the literature

demonstrates a significant negative correlation between robust family emotional support and geriatric depression; higher emotional support directly corresponds to diminished depressive risks and elevated life-satisfaction scores.

Second, instrumental support. This dimension represents the highly visible and physically demanding facet of caregiving. Instrumental support entails direct assistance with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)—such as bathing, feeding, dressing, and mobility—as well as Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs), including meal preparation, medication management, and transportation to healthcare facilities. For older adults suffering from chronic illnesses, post-stroke impairments, or general frailty, instrumental support is a critical determinant of survival rather than a luxury. Reviewed studies confirm a powerful causal relationship between instrumental support and objective health outcomes, demonstrating that medication adherence and nutritional status remain heavily contingent upon active family involvement.

Third, economic and financial support. In Indonesia, where formal pension schemes are predominantly restricted to former civil servants, military personnel, and corporate employees, financial transfers from adult children to aging parents constitute a deeply institutionalized cultural norm. This support encompasses underwriting daily subsistence costs, housing, and out-of-pocket medical expenditures not fully covered by the national health insurance (*BPJS Kesehatan*). The data indicate that geriatric economic stability is profoundly dependent on intergenerational financial transfers. However, within resource-constrained households, this structural arrangement shifts an immense financial burden onto the sandwich generation (Kusumaningrum, 2018).

Fourth, informational support. Family members serve as critical informational proxies, offering guidance, advice, and feedback that help older adults navigate complex modern socio-medical systems. Due to digital divides, the elderly frequently struggles to access or verify digital health informatics. Adult children and grandchildren act as essential information filters—scheduling clinical appointments, demonstrating the operation of modern medical devices, or validating health news. This support substantially enhances geriatric self-efficacy, fostering a sense of agency over their health conditions.

Fifth, appraisal support. This dimension involves delivering positive affirmation, recognizing the elderly's continued value, and involving them in family decision-making processes. Appraisal support is crucial for sustaining self-esteem among older adults who frequently experience feelings of obsolescence post-retirement. Respecting the opinions of the elderly during family deliberations is a subtle yet highly impactful mechanism to prevent domestic isolation and psychosocial marginalization.

Based on the synthesis of literature, the correlation between family support dimensions and elderly quality of life indicators can be systematized as follows:

Table 2
Matrix of Family Support Dimensions and Geriatric Quality of Life Indicators

Support Dimension	Primary Behavioral Indicators	Dominant Impact on Quality of Life
Emotional	Active listening, empathy, physical touch, sustained presence.	Mental Health: Minimizes depression and psychological distress; enhances life satisfaction.
Instrumental	ADL/IADL assistance, physical care, medical transportation.	Physical Health: Ensures medication adherence, optimal nutrition, and medical access.
Informational	Provision of medical advice, health literacy guidance, scheduling.	Autonomy: Enhances self-efficacy, health literacy, and situational control.
Appraisal	Affirmation, requesting advice, inclusion in familial decisions.	Psychosocial: Bolsters self-esteem, dignity, and perceived existential meaning.

Discussion

Empirical statistics reveal a striking prevalence of this phenomenon, indicating that approximately 48.7% of the Indonesian productive-age population (specifically ages 25–45) falls into the sandwich generation category (Roring & Simanjuntak, 2024). This compounding double burden exacerbates the risk of intergenerational poverty, as high expenditures for geriatric care and children's education severely restrict private asset accumulation. This prolonged structural pressure manifests micro-socially as physical exhaustion, acute psychological distress, household financial volatility, and an elevated risk of invisible elder neglect.

Structural Obstacles in the Implementation of the *BKL* Program

Although the government-sponsored *Bina Keluarga Lansia* (BKL) [Family Development for the Elderly] program was designed as a community-based support system, its efficacy in alleviating the sandwich generation's burden remains severely limited by several critical operational constraints: *First*, top-down and generic paradigms. Intervention models deployed by the BKL remain predominantly unidirectional and narrow, focusing almost exclusively on basic medical knowledge transfer (Safitri, 2025). These programs routinely fail to address the complex, unique psychosocial dynamics and emotional pressures experienced by sandwich generation caregivers (Pashazade et al., 2024). *Second*, neglect of conflict resolution and financial management. Current curricula ignore essential caregiver coping strategies, such as role-conflict resolution, stress management, and navigating the specific financial pressures faced by squeezed productive-age cohorts.

Third, gender asymmetry in caregiving. The domestic caregiving burden remains profoundly unequal. Cultural expectations heavily dictate that women assume the role of primary caregivers, frequently forcing them into zero-sum choices between career advancement and familial obligation. *Fourth*, deficits in practical competencies. A

significant portion of informal caregivers manage frail older adults based entirely on intuition or legacy traditions (Schröder-Butterfill, 2004; Widyastuti et al., 2023). This occurs because community outreach programs have failed to equip families with practical, structured Long-Term Care (LTC) techniques.

Digitalization of Social Counseling: An Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) Perspective

To address these operational deficits, integrating social media and digital communication tools (such as structured WhatsApp Groups) into social work counseling offers a highly strategic framework. This digital shift can be theoretically validated using the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986):

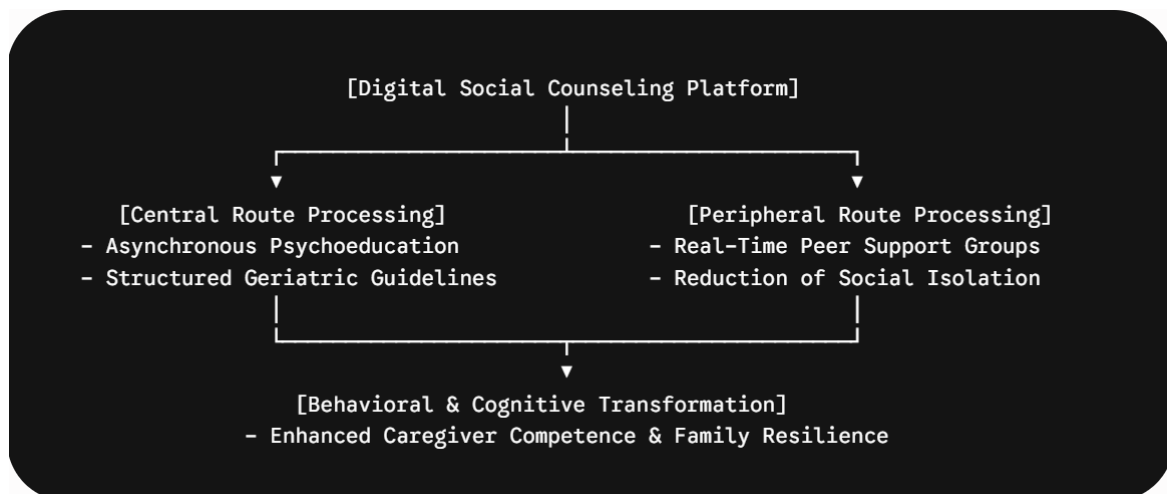


Figure 1. Digital Social Counseling Platform

1. Optimizing Accessibility (Central and Peripheral Routes). Digitalization allows tailored educational messages to be delivered flexibly. This flexibility effectively bypasses the acute time poverty of the sandwich generation, whose high professional mobility prevents participation in traditional, physical counseling sessions.
2. Facilitating Peer Support Networks. Digital platforms enable real-time experiential exchange among informal caregivers. Empirically, this peer connection serves as a vital mediator that reduces social isolation and mitigates the perceived severity of the caregiver burden.
3. Fostering Systematic Role Transformation. Through digital channels, social counseling transitions from a static information broadcast into a dynamic empowerment process. This intervention effectively transforms the family from a passive, overwhelmed shelter into a highly competent and resilient support system.

Macro-Level Policy Recommendations: Strengthening Family Resilience

To resolve the structural vulnerabilities identified in this study, several strategic, macro-level policy interventions are urgently required: *First*, institutionalization of respite care services. The government must develop subsidized, accessible, and community-based respite care facilities. Providing short-term relief to primary caregivers is essential to mitigate chronic burnout and prevent the collapse of family caregiving structures. *Second*, fiscal and social incentive mechanisms. Deforming the

financial pressure requires the implementation of targeted tax incentives, subsidies, or social allowances for low-income households engaged in home-based eldercare. This intervention is critical to arrest the cycle of intergenerational poverty. *Third*, structural revitalization of the BKL program. The scope of the BKL program must be expanded, particularly across densely populated urban centers. Its curriculum must be modernized to address the specific vulnerabilities of the sandwich generation, incorporating evidence-based modules on caregiver stress management, financial literacy, and digital health informatics.

Conclusion

This study underscores that Indonesia is at a critical demographic crossroads, where a rapid transition toward an aged society directly threatens the sustainability of its traditional, family-based eldercare infrastructure. While structural cultural norms of filial piety position the family as the primary pillar of long-term care (*Das Sollen*), modern socioeconomic realities, high professional mobility, and rising living costs have eroded domestic caregiving capacities (*Das Sein*).

Through a systematic literature review and qualitative metasynthesis of empirical evidence ($n = 25$), this research mapped the multidimensional caregiver burden—encompassing severe physical, psychological, financial, and social strains—that disproportionately subverts the well-being of the Indonesian "Sandwich Generation." A critical insight generated by this synthesis is the profound geriatric competence gap within households. Although families remain the primary vehicle for eldercare, they lack the necessary cognitive and psychomotor skills, a vulnerability that conventional, top-down, and purely medicalized public health programs have failed to address.

In response, this study establishes the transformative urgency of contextual social counseling. Deployed through an innovative framework that integrates clinical assessment tools (such as the Zarit Burden Interview) with digital communication technologies and local community networks like the *Bina Keluarga Lansia* (BKL) program, social counseling offers a scalable solution. By leveraging both central and peripheral cognitive pathways, digital psychoeducation effectively mitigates caregiver time poverty and fosters vital peer support structures.

Ultimately, this research shifts the paradigm of social work intervention from viewing the family as a passive, overwhelmed shelter into empowering it as a highly competent, resilient support system. To ensure the sustainability of this model, macro-level structural adjustments are imperative. Governments and policymakers must urgently institutionalize subsidized respite care services, implement fiscal and social incentives to prevent intergenerational poverty, and structurally modernize the BKL curriculum to prioritize caregiver mental health, role-conflict management, and digital health literacy.

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