



Strategies of Female-Headed Households in Managing Roles and Resources: Analysis of Family Socio-Economic Resilience in Garut Regency, West Java

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: April, 24, 2026

Revised: May, 27, 2026

Accepted: June, 29, 2026

Keywords:

Adaptive strategies;
Female-headed households;
Feminization of poverty;
Socio-economic resilience;
Women's empowerment.

Abstract

Female-headed households often face layered socio-economic vulnerabilities, yet their everyday strategies for sustaining family resilience remain insufficiently examined. This study explores the role and resource management strategies of female-headed households who are members of PEKKA in Garut Regency, West Java, Indonesia. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected from five primary informants and seventeen supporting participants through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, field observations, and documentation from March to August 2025. The data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, supported by source triangulation, member checking, reflexive discussion, and audit trail procedures. The findings show that women became household heads through diverse pathways, including widowhood, divorce, husband's migration, illness, old age, and limited financial support. In response, PEKKA members developed interconnected strategies: diversifying livelihoods through informal work, mobilizing family labor, negotiating domestic and caregiving responsibilities, utilizing social networks, and transforming limited household assets into productive resources. The study further reveals that socio-economic resilience was not built solely through income generation, but through resource bricolage, psychosocial endurance, collective support, and women's capacity to reorganize household roles under constraint. The main contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing the hidden power of PEKKA as everyday resilience, expressed through power within, power with, and power to. These findings suggest that empowerment programs for female-headed households should move beyond temporary assistance by strengthening livelihood access, childcare support, skills development, social protection, local facilitation, and community-based solidarity.

To cite this article: Rustanto, B., Kartika, T., Istyawan, A., Vasthu, R. P., Yuliani, D., Susilawati. (2026). Strategies of Female-Headed Households in Managing Roles and Resources: Analysis of Family Socio-Economic Resilience in Garut Regency, West Java. *Al Qodiri: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial dan Keagamaan*, 24(2), 703-715.

INTRODUCTION

Female-headed households have become an increasingly significant social phenomenon in many developing countries, including Indonesia. Their emergence reflects not only changes in family composition but also broader transformations in gender relations, livelihood systems, migration patterns, marital instability, widowhood, and household economic vulnerability (Oppong et al., 2025; Raj et al., 2025; Sultana et al., 2026). In societies where patriarchal norms remain influential, the

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household head is often socially imagined as a male breadwinner, while women are expected to perform domestic and caregiving roles. However, everyday realities show that many women have taken over the responsibility of earning income, making family decisions, managing care work, and sustaining household survival. This shift challenges the conventional assumption that women's contribution is limited to the private sphere. Female-headed households, therefore, should not be viewed merely as an indicator of family disruption, but as an important site for examining gender inequality, poverty, agency, and socio-economic resilience.

In Indonesia, female-headed households continue to face layered vulnerabilities shaped by structural inequality, cultural expectations, and limited access to productive resources. National data show that approximately 12.73% of households in Indonesia are headed by women, indicating that female household headship is no longer a marginal phenomenon but a substantial social reality (Al-Aghbari et al., 2026; Ekaputri et al., 2025). Women become household heads for various reasons, including the death of a spouse, divorce, male migration, illness, ageing, or the husband's inability to provide regular financial support (Nashwan & Alzouabi, 2023). These women frequently experience a double burden because they are required to secure household income while also managing childcare, eldercare, domestic work, and social obligations. In rural and semi-urban contexts such as Garut Regency, West Java, this burden becomes more complex because employment opportunities are often informal, unstable, and poorly paid. At the same time, divorced women, widows, and women who assume household leadership often encounter stigma and moral judgment from their surrounding communities (Ikhwan et al., 2025; Saeed et al., 2022).

The issue of female-headed households is closely linked to the feminization of poverty. Feminization of poverty occurs when women experience greater exposure to deprivation because of unequal access to income, education, property ownership, employment, credit, social protection, and decision-making power (Zhang et al., 2025). Recent studies also show that gendered household decision-making and unequal control over resources often weaken women's bargaining position within families and communities (Klesment & Van Bavel, 2022; Wong & Daminger, 2024). For female heads of households, poverty is rarely caused by a single factor; it emerges from the interaction of economic hardship, care responsibilities, weak institutional support, and gendered social norms. Nevertheless, many women do not remain passive in the face of these constraints. They develop adaptive strategies through livelihood diversification, household resource management, family labor mobilization, social networking, and participation in community-based support groups.

Within this context, the Program Pemberdayaan Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (PEKKA) has become an important community-based empowerment initiative in Indonesia. PEKKA groups provide a collective space where women can share experiences, access information, strengthen solidarity, build confidence, develop skills, and expand social networks. Garut Regency is a particularly relevant site for this study because it combines rural and semi-urban characteristics, strong traditional gender norms, informal livelihood dependence, and active PEKKA community engagement. These conditions make Garut a meaningful social setting for examining how women negotiate domestic and productive roles under cultural and economic constraints. Many PEKKA members in Garut work in informal sectors such as small trading, domestic services, home industries, caregiving, community work, and agriculture-related activities. Their experiences reveal that socio-economic resilience is not built solely through income generation, but also through emotional endurance, family cooperation, social trust, community participation, and the ability to transform limited resources into survival opportunities.

Previous studies have contributed substantially to the understanding of female-headed households, women's poverty, and empowerment. Akalu & Wang, (2023) found that female-headed households were more vulnerable to food insecurity during crisis situations, while Bagi, (2024) highlighted the social and economic challenges faced by female-headed households in Iran. Studies on single mothers and divorced women have shown that stigma, psychological stress, and limited support systems affect women's well-being and family functioning (Chavda & Nisarga, 2023; Kim, Jeon, & Park, 2023; Kim, Jeon, & Song, 2023). Other studies emphasize that women's empowerment is strongly associated with financial access, bargaining power, collective action, social networks, and control over resources (Diprose, 2023; Jayachandran & Voena, 2026; Li & Lu, 2024; Quisumbing, 2025). In Indonesia, Habib & Sutopo, (2024); Mauludia & Agustina, (2025); Rismawati et al., (2025) show that women's communication, social support, and empowerment strategies play important

roles in strengthening family welfare. These studies confirm that female-headed households should be understood through both vulnerability and agency.

Despite these contributions, several limitations remain in the existing literature. First, many studies still position female-headed households mainly as vulnerable or poor groups, while their everyday agency, role negotiation, and resource creativity receive less analytical attention. Second, previous studies often separate economic survival strategies from social and psychosocial resilience, even though these dimensions are deeply interconnected in women's daily lives. Third, studies on PEKKA in Indonesia have tended to focus on empowerment programs, poverty reduction, or stigma, but have not sufficiently examined how female heads of households simultaneously manage productive roles, domestic responsibilities, family resources, and community networks. Fourth, the idea of women's "hidden power" remains underdeveloped, especially in relation to the dimensions of power within, power with, and power to (Gray et al., 2022). This gap is important because women's resilience is not always visible through formal economic indicators, but often appears through informal practices, emotional strength, family negotiation, mutual support, and collective solidarity.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to explore the strategies of role and resource management employed by female-headed households who are members of PEKKA in Garut Regency, West Java, in strengthening family socio-economic resilience. Specifically, this study examines how women become household heads, how they manage livelihood and domestic roles, how they mobilize household and community resources, and how PEKKA groups function as spaces of psychosocial and economic support. Theoretically, this study contributes to gender empowerment and social resilience studies by showing how female-headed households transform vulnerability into adaptive agency through power within, power with, and power to. Practically, the study provides contextual insights for local governments, social workers, women's empowerment agencies, and community facilitators in designing more gender-responsive empowerment programs. By highlighting the hidden power of PEKKA, this study argues that female-headed households should not be viewed only as beneficiaries of social assistance. Rather, they should be recognized as active social actors who are capable of sustaining, negotiating, and transforming family resilience under structural constraints.

METHOD

Research Design and Site

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the role and resource management strategies of female-headed households who are members of PEKKA in Garut Regency, West Java. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to understand women's lived experiences, adaptive strategies, social meanings, and family socio-economic resilience within their everyday contexts. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate for examining complex human experiences, social relations, and contextual processes that cannot be adequately explained through numerical measurement alone (Dunwoodie et al., 2023; Hendren et al., 2023). The descriptive design enabled the researchers to provide a contextual account of how female heads of households negotiate livelihood responsibilities, domestic roles, household resources, and community support.

The research was conducted in Garut Regency, West Java, Indonesia, from March to August 2025. Garut was selected purposively because it represents a rural and semi-urban setting where traditional gender norms, informal livelihood systems, and community-based women's empowerment activities intersect. The area also has active PEKKA groups coordinated in collaboration with the Dinas Pengendalian Penduduk, Keluarga Berencana, Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak DPPKBPPPA Kabupaten Garut, (2024) of Garut Regency. This context made Garut a relevant site for examining how female-headed households construct resilience under economic, domestic, and psychosocial pressures.

Participants and Sampling

The participants were female heads of households who were involved in PEKKA groups in Garut Regency. Participants were selected using purposive sampling because the study required individuals with direct experience of household headship, economic responsibility, role negotiation, and participation in community-based support networks. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research when participants are chosen based on their relevance to the phenomenon being studied rather than statistical representativeness (Baltes & Ralph, 2022).

The inclusion criteria were: (1) women who became heads of households due to widowhood, divorce, husband's migration, husband's illness, old age, or lack of financial support from husbands; (2) women who carried primary or substantial responsibility for household economic survival; (3) women who had family dependents, including children, parents, parents-in-law, or other relatives; and (4) women who were willing to participate voluntarily in interviews, observations, or group discussions. Women who did not provide informed consent or were unwilling to share their experiences voluntarily were excluded.

Five primary informants were selected for in-depth interviews. They represented variations in age, education, marital status, family size, and livelihood background. In addition, 17 supporting participants were involved, consisting of other PEKKA members, village cadres, and field facilitators from DPPKBP3A. The involvement of supporting participants was intended to enrich contextual understanding and strengthen data triangulation. Data collection was continued until the main themes became repetitive and no substantially new information emerged from interviews, focus group discussions, observations, or documents. This indicated that data saturation had been reached, particularly regarding pathways into household headship, livelihood diversification, domestic role negotiation, household resource mobilization, group support, and psychosocial resilience.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, field observations, and documentation. The semi-structured interview guideline explored several key topics, including pathways into household headship, livelihood strategies, domestic role management, household resource use, access to social support, participation in PEKKA groups, and perceptions of socio-economic resilience. Semi-structured interviews were used because they provide direction while allowing participants to explain their experiences in their own words (Dolczewski, 2022; Hwang et al., 2023).

Three focus group discussions were conducted with PEKKA members, with each session involving approximately six to eight participants. The FGDs were used to explore collective experiences related to solidarity, coping strategies, stigma, community participation, and group-based empowerment. Field observations were conducted to examine participants' daily activities, including work routines, childcare practices, household management, community interaction, and participation in PEKKA activities such as regular meetings, skills training, and productive economic activities. Documentation was obtained from DPPKBP3A reports, PEKKA group records, BPS publications, previous studies, and relevant institutional documents. All interviews and FGDs were conducted with participants' permission, recorded where consent was given, transcribed verbatim, anonymized, and organized for analysis.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis as developed by (Naeem et al., 2023). This technique was selected because it enables researchers to identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning across qualitative data. The analysis was conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge from empirical data rather than from predetermined assumptions. The process began with verbatim transcription of interviews and FGDs, followed by repeated reading of transcripts, field notes, and documents to obtain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. The researchers then conducted open coding by identifying meaningful words, phrases, events, and statements related to household headship, livelihood strategies, domestic role management, resource mobilization, social support, and resilience.

Similar codes were grouped into broader categories and then developed into major themes. These themes included reasons for becoming female heads of households, livelihood diversification, domestic role negotiation, household resource management, community-based support, psychosocial resilience, and hidden power. The themes were reviewed by comparing interview findings, FGD data, field observations, and documentation. Interpretation was conducted by connecting the empirical themes with relevant concepts, including gender empowerment, social resilience, feminization of poverty, and power relations, particularly the dimensions of power within, power with, and power to (Tran et al., 2023).

Trustworthiness was maintained through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Adler, 2022). Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of sources and

techniques, as well as member checking with participants to confirm key interpretations. Transferability was supported by providing a detailed description of the research context, participant characteristics, and socio-cultural setting. Dependability was ensured through systematic documentation of the research process, including field notes, interview records, coding notes, and analytic memos. Confirmability was enhanced through an audit trail and reflexive discussion among the researchers. Researcher reflexivity was applied by documenting methodological decisions, discussing potential assumptions within the research team, and ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives and observed practices.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical principles in social research, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, respect for participants' dignity, and sensitivity to potentially traumatic experiences (Alessi & Kahn, 2023; Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Field permission was obtained through coordination with DPPKBP3A Kabupaten Garut and local PEKKA facilitators before data collection began. Before interviews, FGDs, and observations were conducted, participants received clear information about the purpose of the study, the type of data collected, the use of data for academic purposes, and their right to refuse or withdraw at any stage without negative consequences.

All participants provided voluntary consent. To protect privacy, participants' real names were replaced with pseudonyms such as Mawar, Lily, Melati, Rose, and Dahlia. The researchers used an empathetic and non-judgmental approach because several participants had experienced divorce, domestic conflict, economic hardship, illness in the family, or the loss of a spouse. Sensitive questions were asked carefully, and participants were not required to answer questions that made them uncomfortable. Research data were stored securely and used only for academic analysis. The researchers also applied the principle of reciprocity by providing constructive feedback to PEKKA groups and local stakeholders regarding family support, parenting practices, group capacity, and community-based empowerment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study are presented thematically based on the main patterns that emerged from interviews, focus group discussions, field observations, and supporting documents. The analysis focuses on how female-headed households entered household leadership, managed livelihood responsibilities, negotiated domestic roles, mobilized limited resources, and built family socio-economic resilience. This structure allows the findings to move beyond individual narratives and present a cross-case understanding of PEKKA strategies in Garut Regency.

Profile of Informants and Pathways into Female Household Headship

This study involved five primary informants who were female heads of households and members of PEKKA in Garut Regency, West Java. The informants represented different ages, educational backgrounds, livelihood activities, household compositions, and reasons for assuming household headship. Their experiences show that becoming a female head of household was not caused by a single factor. In several cases, women assumed household leadership because husbands were absent for long periods, ill, elderly, economically inactive, or no longer present due to divorce or death. These conditions placed women in a central position as income earners, household decision-makers, caregivers, and managers of family resources.

Table 1. Profile of Primary Informants

Informant	Age	Education	Main Livelihood	Income Pattern	Household Situation
Mawar	36	Senior high school	Administrative worker and cadre	Around IDR 467,000 per month, irregularly paid	Lives with seven family members, including children, parents-in-law, and relatives
Lily	53	Elementary equivalency program	Seller of nasi kuning	Irregular income	Lives with 17 household members

Informant	Age	Education	Main Livelihood	Income Pattern	Household Situation
Melati	31	Senior high school; currently pursuing higher education	Private motorcycle driver, seller, PAUD teacher, and PEKKA cadre	Around IDR 1,000,000 per month from several activities	Lives with parents after divorce; children live with former husband
Rose	38	Junior high school	Informal domestic work, caregiving, cadre activities, and school escorting	Irregular income; receives PKH assistance of IDR 600,000 per disbursement	Lives with eight household members, including five children
Dahlia	55	Elementary school	Sewing and pattern-making	Around IDR 50,000–200,000 per day	Lives with 12 family members, including children, in-laws, and grandchildren

Table 1 shows that female household headship among PEKKA members emerged from diverse family circumstances. Mawar assumed household leadership because her husband worked outside the city for long periods, leaving her responsible for daily household decisions. Lily became the main household manager because her husband was elderly and ill. Melati's household headship emerged after divorce, while Rose experienced household leadership because her husband had unstable work, did not provide sufficient financial support, and later became ill. Dahlia became a household head after the death of her husband and continued the family's sewing work to support a large household. These cases indicate that female household headship was shaped by both marital transitions and the weakening or absence of the male provider role.

Livelihood Strategies for Family Survival

The findings show that PEKKA members developed several livelihood strategies to sustain their families. These strategies were shaped by limited income, irregular work opportunities, large household responsibilities, and the need to meet daily consumption needs. The informants did not depend on a single source of income. Instead, they combined multiple small-scale jobs, mobilized family labor, and used social networks to access livelihood opportunities.

Work diversification appeared as a central strategy. Mawar combined her work as an administrative staff member with her role as a cadre, although both sources of income were small and irregular. She stated, "Alhamdulillah Bu, kalau dibilang cukup jauh dari cukup, tapi dijalani aja, nambah-nambah untuk jajan anak-anak dan beli pampers ibu." Melati also relied on several livelihood activities, including private motorcycle driving, selling coconut drinks and cakes, teaching at PAUD, and participating as a PEKKA cadre. She explained, "Bu saya mah bekerja apa aja, ngojek iya, saya punya langganan mengantar jemput ke sekolah, langganan saya seorang guru, saya juga jualan kelapa muda, buat kue, saya juga mengajar di PAUD." These statements show that multiple jobs were not pursued to accumulate wealth, but to maintain daily survival and reduce dependence on one unstable income source.

Family labor was also an important livelihood resource. Lily relied on support from her working child to meet household needs, as reflected in her statement, "Alhamdulillah abdi dibantos ku pun anak nu tos di damel Bu, upami henteu mah abdi repot." Dahlia applied a similar strategy by involving her children and in-laws in sewing production. When she worked alone, her income was around IDR 50,000 per day; when family members helped, household production increased and income could reach IDR 200,000 per day. This pattern indicates that household resilience was not produced by female heads alone, but also through collective family labor coordinated by women.

Social networks also functioned as practical livelihood resources. Melati obtained work opportunities through friends who informed her about motorcycle driving work. Dahlia received information from a PKH facilitator regarding educational support for her child. These findings show

that friendship, cadre networks, facilitators, and community relations were not merely emotional support systems, but also channels for accessing employment, education, and assistance.

Domestic Role Management and Care Arrangements

Besides earning income, the informants were responsible for domestic work, childcare, eldercare, and household organization. Domestic role management was carried out through three main strategies: completing household tasks before leaving home, delegating childcare to relatives, and dividing household responsibilities with family members. These strategies enabled PEKKA members to balance productive and reproductive roles within limited time and resources.

Mawar prioritized domestic duties before engaging in work or community activities. She explained, "Pokokna kegiatan di rumah selesaikan dulu, makan buat anak, antar sekolah anak, ngurus orang tua harus beres. Baru setelahnya aku teh bisa ngelanjutin kerja atau main aja sama dan kader-kader lainnya." This statement shows that domestic responsibilities remained a moral and practical priority. Work outside the home could be performed only after essential household tasks were completed.

Childcare delegation was another important strategy. Mawar entrusted her child to her sister-in-law so that she could work more calmly. She stated, "Ya saya titipkan ke saudara ipar, jadi pas kerja jadi lebih nyaman dan tenang." Rose also relied on relatives, in-laws, or older children when she had to work. These arrangements show that care responsibilities were redistributed within extended family networks. However, this redistribution did not always remove women's domestic burden; it mainly helped them manage time and reduce the risk of leaving children unattended.

Task sharing also occurred in households where extended family members were available. Melati shared domestic responsibilities with her parents and sibling after returning to her parents' home following divorce. Mawar also relied on her sister-in-law when some household tasks could not be completed. In contrast, Rose performed most domestic tasks by herself, including cooking, washing clothes, washing dishes, and cleaning the house. Her statement, "Abdi mah sanes kanten nyalira Bu, masak nyalira, cuci pakaian, cuci piring, beres-beres rumah," indicates that some PEKKA members still carried a heavy domestic workload with limited support.

Household Resource Mobilization under Scarcity

The findings also show that PEKKA members managed limited resources creatively. Resources were not limited to money, but included personal skills, household goods, family labor, social relations, government programs, and basic food supplies. Under conditions of scarcity, the informants transformed available resources into practical means for survival.

Melati used cooking skills, kitchen tools, a mobile phone, and simple household equipment to support income-generating activities. She explained, "Ya saya paling gunain barang seadanya aja a untuk bekerja, bikin roti, jualan dawegan. Pakai alat-alat dapur seadanya aja weh kayak panci, mixer, blender. Pakai HP juga untuk share jualan ke tetangga gitu." Her statement shows that ordinary household assets can become productive tools when combined with personal skills and initiative. Kitchen equipment that was originally used for domestic purposes was also transformed into a means of producing goods for sale. The mobile phone functioned as a simple but important tool for promoting products and reaching nearby customers. Mawar also emphasized the importance of skills gained from training, particularly in managing household finances and family responsibilities. For PEKKA members, skills were not only used to generate income but also to organize household survival more effectively. These findings indicate that personal capacity and simple household assets became important resources for maintaining family socio-economic resilience.

Dahlia's experience illustrates resource management under more severe scarcity. Her household had to survive with limited food supplies while supporting 12 family members. When the available rice was insufficient, she turned it into porridge so that it could feed more people. This practice shows that resilience was often built through everyday micro-decisions in managing food and consumption. It also reflects how scarcity required practical creativity in arranging household survival. Dahlia also accessed the Rutilahu program after local officials proposed her house for rehabilitation because it was considered uninhabitable. She stated, "Pak RT dan Pak RW sangat perhatian, rumah saya karena tanahnya milik sendiri, kemudian diajukan oleh pak RW untuk diperbaiki dengan bantuan dari pemerintah." This case indicates that local institutional relations could become an important resource for improving household welfare.

Cross-Case Matrix of PEKKA Strategies

Table 2. Cross-Case Matrix of PEKKA Strategies

Informant	Livelihood Strategy	Domestic Strategy	Resource Strategy	Main Resilience Pattern
Mawar	Administrative work and cadre activities	Completes household tasks before outside activities; delegates childcare to relatives	Uses training-based skills to manage household resources	Balancing care, work, and decision-making during husband's migration
Lily	Selling nasi kuning; supported by working child	Relies on family support within a large household	Mobilizes adult child's contribution	Maintaining household survival through intergenerational support
Melati	Motorcycle driving, selling food/drinks, PAUD teaching, and PEKKA cadre work	Shares domestic tasks with parents and sibling	Uses cooking skills, household tools, and mobile phone for selling	Rebuilding economic independence after divorce
Rose	Informal domestic work, caregiving, cadre activities, and school escorting	Performs many domestic tasks independently; sometimes delegates childcare	Uses PKH assistance and informal work opportunities	Surviving under unstable spousal support and heavy care burden
Dahlia	Sewing and pattern-making with family assistance	Shares production-related tasks with children and in-laws	Uses sewing skills, family labor, food management, and Rutilahu support	Sustaining a large household after widowhood

Table 2 shows that the resilience of female-headed households was not formed through one dominant strategy. Instead, it emerged from the interaction of economic, domestic, social, and resource-based strategies. Mawar's resilience was shaped by her ability to manage household decisions during her husband's long absence. Lily relied on intergenerational support within a large household. Melati demonstrated post-divorce economic rebuilding through multiple jobs and skill use. Rose showed endurance under unstable spousal support and heavy domestic responsibility. Dahlia sustained a large family after widowhood by continuing sewing work, involving family members, and accessing local government support.

Integrated Strategy Model of PEKKA Resilience



Figure 1. Integrated Strategies of PEKKA in Building Family Socio-Economic Resilience

Figure 1 summarizes the integrated pattern of PEKKA resilience found in this study. Female household headship emerged from different family pathways, but all informants had to respond to economic, domestic, and social pressures. Their resilience was built through livelihood diversification, domestic role negotiation, and creative resource mobilization. These strategies were not separate from one another; they worked together to sustain household continuity. The model also shows that the hidden power of PEKKA was expressed through everyday practices of survival, decision-making, care management, and the ability to transform scarcity into adaptive action.

Summary of Key Findings

The results identify four major findings. First, female household headship among PEKKA members in Garut emerged from diverse pathways, including widowhood, divorce, husband's migration, husband's illness or old age, and lack of financial support from husbands. Second, livelihood resilience was built through multiple income-generating activities, family labor mobilization, and the use of social networks to access work and support. Third, domestic resilience depended on women's ability to negotiate care arrangements, divide household tasks, and manage childcare under limited support conditions. Fourth, household resource resilience was constructed by optimizing personal skills, household goods, food supplies, family labor, government programs, and community relations.

Overall, the findings show that PEKKA members were not merely vulnerable women facing poverty and social pressure. They were active household managers who developed practical, relational, and adaptive strategies to sustain family survival. Their resilience was visible in everyday decisions: accepting multiple jobs, involving family members in production, entrusting children to relatives, turning household goods into productive assets, stretching limited food resources, and accessing community or government support. These practices reveal the hidden power of PEKKA as women who transform scarcity into opportunity, vulnerability into agency, and household burden into collective resilience.

Discussion

The first important finding of this study is that female household headship among PEKKA members in Garut did not emerge from a single pathway, but from multiple disruptions in the expected male provider role, including widowhood, divorce, husband's migration, illness, old age, and limited financial support. This finding indicates that female household headship should not be understood merely as a marital status category, but as a social position produced by shifting family responsibilities and unequal gender arrangements. Conceptually, it supports the argument that household leadership is shaped by both structural vulnerability and women's adaptive agency. The finding is consistent with studies showing that female-headed households are often exposed to economic insecurity, social stigma, and limited institutional support (Akalu & Wang, 2023; Bagi, 2024; Saeed et al., 2022). However, this study extends previous research by showing that PEKKA women in Garut did not only experience vulnerability; they also actively reorganized household roles when male economic responsibility became absent, weakened, or unreliable. In this sense, female household headship becomes a process of role transformation rather than merely a consequence of family breakdown. The implication is that policies for female-headed households should not be limited to welfare assistance, but must recognize women's actual role as household decision-makers and resilience builders.

The second finding shows that livelihood resilience was built through work diversification, informal employment, family labor mobilization, and social networks. This pattern suggests that economic survival among PEKKA members was not based on stable employment, but on the ability to combine multiple small and irregular income sources. Theoretically, this finding strengthens the concept of adaptive strategies by showing how women respond to economic precarity through flexible livelihood arrangements. It is in line with studies that connect women's empowerment with financial access, bargaining power, social networks, and control over resources (Diprose, 2023; Jayachandran & Voena, 2026; Li & Lu, 2024; Quisumbing, 2025). Nevertheless, the Garut case adds a more grounded perspective by showing that empowerment does not always begin from formal capital or institutional intervention; it may begin from informal work, kinship support, small-scale trade, and community information channels. This also explains why family labor became important, because large household responsibilities could not be sustained by one woman's income alone. Thus,

livelihood resilience in this study reflects a relational form of economic agency, where women's survival capacity depends on their ability to coordinate work, family contribution, and social ties.

The third finding reveals that domestic role management remained central to PEKKA resilience, particularly through task prioritization, childcare delegation, and household task sharing. This finding is critical because economic participation did not remove women's domestic responsibilities; instead, it added another layer of responsibility to their existing care burden. From a gender empowerment perspective, this confirms that women's agency is always negotiated within unequal care arrangements and cultural expectations. The finding supports previous studies showing that single mothers and divorced women often face psychological pressure, stigma, and increased domestic responsibility (Chavda & Nisarga, 2023; Kim, Jeon, & Park, 2023; Kim, Jeon, & Song, 2023). However, this study provides a more nuanced explanation by showing that care work was not simply a burden, but also a field of negotiation where women redistributed responsibilities through relatives, in-laws, parents, siblings, or older children. The difference from some prior studies lies in the strong role of extended family arrangements in Garut, which partly reduced women's care pressure while also maintaining traditional expectations that women remain responsible for household order. Therefore, domestic resilience must be understood not only as women's ability to endure care responsibilities, but also as their capacity to negotiate time, support, and household cooperation.

The fourth finding highlights that PEKKA members mobilized limited resources creatively by transforming personal skills, household goods, family labor, food supplies, local relationships, and government programs into survival mechanisms. This pattern can be interpreted as a form of resource bricolage, in which women recombine whatever resources are available to solve immediate household problems and sustain family life. Rather than relying on formal capital or stable institutional support, PEKKA members used everyday assets—such as kitchen equipment, mobile phones, sewing skills, food management practices, family labor, and neighborhood ties—as flexible resources for survival. Theoretically, this extends the concept of socio-economic resilience by showing that resilience is not only the capacity to recover from hardship, but also the capacity to creatively reorganize scarce resources into practical solutions. This finding aligns with studies showing that women's empowerment is linked to access to resources, collective action, and strategic decision-making in constrained environments (Klesment & Van Bavel, 2022; Wong & Daminger, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). However, this study adds that the resources most meaningful to poor female-headed households are often informal, small-scale, relational, and embedded in daily life. Consequently, empowerment programs should not only provide credit and training, but also strengthen childcare support, local facilitation, household asset utilization, food security, and access to basic social protection.

The final and most important finding is that the resilience of PEKKA members reflects hidden power as everyday resilience. Using the framework of power within, power with, and power to, this study shows that PEKKA women developed inner strength to survive hardship, collective strength through family and community networks, and practical power to transform limited resources into adaptive action (Gray et al., 2022). This finding supports empowerment theory, but also refines it by showing that power among poor female-headed households is often quiet, informal, and embedded in routine survival practices rather than formal leadership or public authority. Previous studies have emphasized the role of social support and empowerment in strengthening women's welfare (Habib & Sutopo, 2024; Mauludia & Agustina, 2025; Rismawati et al., 2025), but this study contributes a sharper conceptual perspective by positioning hidden power as the mechanism that connects vulnerability, agency, and resilience. In the Garut context, women's strength did not emerge because structural barriers disappeared; rather, it emerged because women continuously negotiated those barriers through work, care, resource bricolage, and collective support. This insight fills an important gap in the global literature by showing that female-headed households should not be framed only through poverty, risk, or dependency. They should also be understood as active agents who produce family socio-economic resilience through everyday practices of survival, negotiation, and transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that female-headed households who are members of PEKKA in Garut Regency construct family socio-economic resilience through adaptive, relational, and resource-based strategies. Women became household heads through different pathways, including widowhood, divorce, husband's migration, illness, old age, and limited financial support from husbands. These conditions placed them in a central role as income earners, caregivers, household decision-makers, and resource managers. The findings show that PEKKA members sustained their families by diversifying livelihoods, mobilizing family labor, negotiating domestic responsibilities, using social networks, and transforming limited household resources into survival mechanisms. Their resilience was therefore not formed through a single strategy, but through the continuous interaction between economic effort, domestic role management, community support, and everyday resource bricolage.

The main contribution of this study lies in showing that PEKKA members should not be understood only as vulnerable women affected by poverty, stigma, and structural inequality. They also possess hidden power as everyday resilience, expressed through inner strength, collective support, practical creativity, and the ability to transform scarcity into adaptive action. Theoretically, this study extends gender empowerment and social resilience perspectives by demonstrating how power within, power with, and power to operate in the everyday lives of female-headed households. Practically, the findings suggest that empowerment programs for PEKKA should move beyond temporary assistance and focus on strengthening livelihood access, childcare support, skills development, social protection, local facilitation, and community-based solidarity. Future studies may expand the analysis by involving more regions, comparing rural and urban PEKKA groups, or examining how policy interventions affect women's long-term socio-economic resilience.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Bambang Rustanto conceived and designed the study, developed the research framework, supervised the overall research process, and contributed to the interpretation of the findings and the critical revision of the manuscript. Tuti Kartika conducted the field investigation, collected and organized the research data, performed the initial data analysis, and prepared the first draft of the manuscript. Aryohaji Istyawan contributed to the research methodology, participated in data collection and validation, and assisted in refining the analytical framework and manuscript. Rajendra Panggita Vasthu contributed to data analysis, interpretation of the findings, visualization of the research results, and critical manuscript revision. Dwi Yuliani supported the investigation process, verified the research data, contributed to data validation, and participated in manuscript revision. Susilawati supervised the research implementation, contributed to conceptual refinement, project administration, and critical review of the manuscript.

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