

## The Resilience of Poor Families in Striving for Higher Education for Their Children in Donggo Subdistrict

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### Abstract

Poverty remains a major problem in rural areas, including in Donggo District, Bima Regency, and has a significant impact on families' limited access to higher education. Although poverty rates in Bima Regency are showing a downward trend, human development disparities remain high, forcing poor families to develop resilience strategies to fight for their children's education. This study aims to understand the forms of resilience of poor families in overcoming structural, cultural, and economic barriers to their children's higher education. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital. The results show that poor families in Donggo rely on a combination of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital to maintain their children's education. Economic strategies are realized through subsistence farming, job diversification, and the sale of small assets; social support comes from kinship networks and community mutual aid; local Maja Labo Dahu cultural values function as symbolic capital that strengthens family motivation, while structural challenges in the form of geographical distance, indirect costs, and non-adaptive assistance policies limit their efforts.

**Keywords:** *Family Resilience, Higher Education, Poverty.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Higher education is seen as an important pathway to social mobility, especially for poor families in rural areas. However, for families living in remote areas, access to higher education is often hampered by limited funds, distance, and low educational literacy. Tottenham & Galván (2023) emphasize that poverty and chronic stress have a direct impact on educational inequality, so that family strategies for survival and adaptation are factors that are no less important than the availability of educational assistance.

The poverty rate in Bima Regency shows a downward trend from year to year. In 2015, the poverty rate was recorded at 16.10%, decreasing to 15.31% in 2016, and further decreasing to 15.10% in 2017 and 15.01% in 2018. However, the main issue is not only related to the decline in poverty rates, but also the relatively high disparity in human development. The Human Development Index (HDI) of Bima Regency has increased over the last four years, from 63.46 in 2015 to 64.15 in 2016, 65.01 in 2017, and 65.46 in 2018. These achievements indicate that the HDI of Bima Regency has moved from the medium category to the high category. However, this data shows that economic growth has not been able to fully overcome development gaps between regions, both between

regencies and between regencies and cities within the province (Rimawan & Aryani, 2019).

The Donggo subdistrict in Bima Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, provides a clear example of how geographical and local economic factors exacerbate these challenges. Donggo is located in a hilly and arid region. Most families depend on subsistence agriculture, which provides fluctuating incomes. This situation causes indirect costs for college, such as transportation to the cities of Bima or Dompu and others, accommodation, and daily living expenses, to become a significant burden. A World Bank (2020) study on education in Indonesia shows that although formal access to education has been expanded, families in rural areas still face quality gaps and hidden costs that hinder the sustainability of higher education.

In addition to economic factors, local culture also influences family strategies. The Bima community in Donggo District is known for its Maja Labo Dahu (shame and fear of doing wrong) values, which emphasize honor, responsibility, and mutual cooperation. This value often becomes a social resource that strengthens family resilience in supporting children's education. In a theoretical framework, family resilience is understood not only as an internal ability to survive but also as an interaction with social capital, policies, and community support

(Masten, 2021; Ras et al., 2022). Thus, poor families in Donggo mobilize not only economic strategies, but also social networks based on local culture to fight for their children's higher education.

Higher education is an important instrument for breaking the cycle of poverty and increasing social mobility, but access to it is still very limited for poor families, especially in rural areas. As Gu (2021) emphasizes, the digital divide and limited educational infrastructure have exacerbated the vulnerability of poor families, resulting in unequal access to online and offline learning for children. This shows that poor families need adaptive strategies so that their children can continue their higher education.

Recent studies show that family resilience is not only shaped by economic strategies but also includes the ability to utilize social and local cultural capital. According to Brown et al. (2023), their systematic review shows that a resilient education system is supported by the flexibility of community adaptation and layered social support, especially in areas with limited resources. In other words, resilience in education is the result of interaction between the efforts of families, communities, and educational institutions.

In the Indonesian context, education policy has provided opportunities through assistance programs such as the Indonesia Smart Card (*KIP*). However, challenges in rural areas remain significant, not only in terms of tuition fees but also indirect costs such as transportation, housing, and students' daily needs. Chidakwa's (2024) findings in Zimbabwe show that rural students are able to navigate structural barriers through culturally-based community support, demonstrating the relevance of a collective resilience-based approach in understanding the struggles of poor families in rural areas.

The Donggo sub-district in Bima Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, is a concrete example of how poor families face these challenges. It is located in a hilly area with limited water for agriculture, while the majority of the community depends on subsistence farming for their livelihood. In these conditions, Donggo families not only rely on economic strategies (saving harvests, working part-time), but also mobilize social networks and local cultural values such as *Maja Labo Dahu* (shame and fear of doing wrong), which encourage collective solidarity. These culture-based strategies are an important support for their children to continue their higher education in the city.

Studies on the resilience of poor families in Indonesia still focus more on macro policy aspects or urban contexts, and have not sufficiently explored rural socio-cultural practices as a source of resilience. Thus, this research is important to fill this gap and contribute academically to the global literature on the resilience of poor families in pursuing higher education.

However, there is a clear research gap. Most studies on access to higher education in Indonesia focus on national policies or urban contexts, while the practices of rural family resilience are rarely described in detail (Zhang & Liu, 2024). In fact, case studies in local contexts such as the Donggo District can provide new insights into how a combination of geographical limitations, subsistence economic conditions, and cultural values influences families' strategies in accessing higher education. Based on this, the study aims to analyze how poor families in Donggo Subdistrict build resilience through internal strategies, community support, and cultural capital in fighting for their children's higher education.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-interpretative approach to understand the dynamics of resilience among poor families in fighting for their children's higher education in Donggo District. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore subjective meanings, adaptation strategies, and social practices carried out by families in facing limitations. As emphasized by Creswell & Poth (2018), qualitative research aims to explore the experiences of individuals or groups in a particular social context, making it suitable for revealing the reality of poor families in depth.

The main data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interview techniques were used to obtain direct narratives from parents and children regarding the strategies they used to support higher education. This is in line with Flick (2019), who emphasizes that qualitative interviews provide space for participants to articulate their experiences and perceptions. Participant observation was also used to capture family interactions in everyday socio-cultural contexts, while documentation helped validate information related to economic conditions, school data, and social support.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis model as described by Braun and Clarke

(2021), namely through the stages of coding, theme identification, and interpretation of patterns of meaning that emerged from the field data. Using this technique, researchers can link family resilience practices to the socio-cultural context of the Donggo District. The analysis process was interactive and continuous, in accordance with Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019), who emphasized the importance of data reduction, data presentation, and concluding simultaneously.

To ensure validity, this study used source and method triangulation. Triangulation was carried out by comparing interview results between informants, matching observation data with documents, and linking field findings with academic literature. Denzin (2019) asserts that triangulation is an important strategy for increasing trustworthiness in qualitative research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the introduction using the above research, the results of this study can be classified as follows:

### Family Economic Strategies

The results show that poor families in Donggo Subdistrict utilize subsistence agriculture-based economic strategies to finance their children's higher education. Harvests such as rice and corn are often the main source of education funds, either directly through the sale of agricultural products or as food reserves that reduce household consumption costs. When education costs increase, especially when children have to pay tuition fees or have urgent needs in the city, families implement additional strategies such as selling small livestock, doing odd jobs, or migrating temporarily to earn additional income.

These strategies reflect the coping strategies of poor families as described by Walsh (2021), namely that family resilience often depends on the ability to adapt flexibly to economic pressures through the management of limited resources. Thus, consumption savings, job diversification, and the utilization of small assets are tangible forms of the Donggo family's struggle to maintain their children's education.

These findings are consistent with the results of international studies. For example, research by Zhang and Liu (2024) in China shows that low-income families tend to rely on informal strategies such as part-time work and the utilization of productive assets to cover their children's educational needs, because formal assistance from the government is insufficient

to cover indirect costs. Similar conditions were also found in the African context by Chidakwa (2024), who confirmed that rural families developed labor-based and household asset-based adaptation patterns as a form of resilience in the face of structural limitations in accessing higher education.

In the local context of Donggo, this family economic strategy is not only individual in nature but also reflects a pattern of collective resilience. Families strive to balance short-term needs for survival with long-term needs to send their children to college. This is in line with Masten's (2021) thinking on multisystemic resilience, which views resilience not merely as endurance, but also as the result of dynamic interactions between individuals, families, and the surrounding social system. Thus, it can be understood that the economic strategies of poor families in Donggo are an important foundation that supports the continuity of their children's education, while also reflecting the unique adaptability of rural communities with limited resources.

The economic strategies of poor families in Donggo, which rely on subsistence farming, odd jobs, and the sale of small livestock to finance their children's higher education, can be interpreted through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital. Economic capital is clearly the most fundamental factor because families rely on productive assets such as land, crops, and livestock to support educational needs. Although limited, this economic capital is the main foundation for children to attend college.

However, family resilience does not depend solely on economic capital. Social capital is also very significant, especially in the form of local solidarity networks. In Donggo District, mutual assistance practices and kinship networks enable families to obtain support in the form of informal loans, additional labor during harvest time, or transportation assistance when children have to leave for college in Bima, Makassar, Mataram, Java, or other cities in Indonesia. This social capital is in line with Bourdieu's view that social networks can be converted into material and symbolic support (Bourdieu, 1986/2011).

Cultural capital is evident when poor families in Donggo Subdistrict place a high value on higher education. Even though they themselves do not have a higher education, there is a belief that the success of their children in college will raise the family's social status. This belief confirms the internalization of the

habitus of education as a path to social mobility, which shows how cultural capital is invested despite economic limitations (Grenfell, 2020).

In addition, symbolic capital is present in the form of social recognition from the community. Families who successfully send their children to college are considered more respected because this success is seen as a symbol of prestige and collective pride. This recognition serves as a moral incentive that strengthens family resilience, while also demonstrating how limited economic capital can be reinforced by social and symbolic legitimacy (Swartz, 2020).

Bourdieu's theory of capital shows that the resilience of poor families in Donggo District is not only based on narrow economic strategies, but on the accumulation and conversion of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital that support each other. This process shapes the educational arena as a space of struggle where poor families use all available forms of capital to fight against structures of inequality.

### **Social Support and Kinship**

The resilience of poor families in Donggo Subdistrict is not only supported by internal economic strategies, but also by strong social support and kinship. Extended family solidarity is a key pillar. In many cases, close relatives cover the cost of transporting children from villages to cities or even provide free accommodation while they pursue higher education. This pattern shows that the responsibility for children's education is not only borne by the nuclear family but is shared collectively within a wider kinship network.

In addition, community mutual assistance plays an important role in supporting the continuity of education for children from poor families. Neighbors, traditional institutions, and community leaders often assist in the form of emergency loans, contributions to social events, or simply moral support. This is in line with Chidakwa's (2024) findings, which show that rural communities in Zimbabwe function as a social buffer that can mitigate the impact of family economic vulnerability in striving for access to higher education. This community support is also seen as a form of collective resilience, where a child's educational success is considered a shared achievement.

Meanwhile, in Pierre Bourdieu's capital, social support and kinship in the Donggo District can be understood as a form of social capital that operates in the arena of education. This social capital is not only in

the form of a network of relationships but also includes trust, moral obligations, and norms of reciprocity that can be converted into economic and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2011). For example, families who receive financial assistance or housing ultimately gain social legitimacy and recognition within the community.

Furthermore, this social capital also transforms into cultural capital when extended families and communities instill the importance of higher education as an instrument of social mobility. The internalization of this value strengthens the habitus of poor families to remain consistent in pursuing education despite economic limitations. Swartz (2020) refers to this as a capital conversion strategy, in which non-economic resources are converted into symbolic power that can counteract structures of inequality. Thus, the resilience of poor families in Donggo Subdistrict does not stand alone, but is shaped by a configuration of social and cultural capital that is closely connected to kinship and community networks. This social support proves that resilience is not only the capacity of individuals or nuclear families, but is the result of social collectivity that is institutionalized in local culture.

### **The Role of Local Culture**

In addition to the above, this study also found that the local cultural value of Maja Labo Dahu, which means shame and fear of doing wrong, plays an important role in shaping the resilience of poor families in the Donggo District in fighting for their children's higher education. This cultural value places educational success as a measure of morality and social responsibility for families. Parents feel obliged to send their children to college not only for the sake of their children's future, but also so that their families are not considered failures by their communities. Thus, education is understood as a form of family honor in the eyes of the community.

This culture of shame encourages poor families to work harder despite their economic limitations. Strategies such as selling small livestock, migrating temporarily, or utilizing kinship networks are often interpreted not merely as economic efforts, but also as the fulfillment of a culturally legitimized moral responsibility. This is in line with Ungar's (2019) findings, which emphasize that family resilience is not only individual in nature but is also supported by cultural values that give meaning to the struggle against economic limitations.

In a broader context, international studies show that local culture often functions as a symbolic resource that strengthens family resilience. According to Theron (2020), communities that internalize collective cultural values tend to have higher levels of resilience because culture provides a moral framework that reinforces action. This finding is consistent with the conditions in Donggo, where Maja Labo Dahu (shame and fear of doing wrong) affirms education as a moral obligation that transcends economic calculations.

When analyzed through Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, Maja Labo Dahu can be understood as a form of symbolic capital. This cultural value serves to provide legitimacy and social recognition for families who succeed in sending their children to college. This symbolic capital then strengthens the family's motivation to convert limited economic capital and utilize social capital in the form of kinship networks and mutual assistance. As explained by Grenfell (2020), symbolic capital is not only related to prestige but also to the symbolic power that regulates the behavior of individuals and groups in the social arena. Thus, the local culture in Donggo is not only a passive norm but also an active symbolic capital that strengthens family resilience in fighting against the structure of educational inequality.

### **Structural Challenges**

Structural challenges are the most obvious obstacle for poor families in Donggo Subdistrict in pursuing higher education for their children. Donggo's geographical location, far from the city center, forces families to incur additional costs for transportation, rent, and daily student needs. Affirmative policies such as the Indonesia Smart Card (KIP) do help ease the burden, but they cannot cover all the needs that arise. Thus, there is a gap between education policy design, which focuses on formal financing, and the socio-economic reality of rural communities, which require more comprehensive support (Ikumu et al., 2024; World Bank, 2020).

This gap can be understood through the concept of rural habitus within Pierre Bourdieu's framework. The habitus of poor families in Donggo Subdistrict is shaped by long experiences of living in limited circumstances, where they are accustomed to managing difficulties through adaptive strategies such as relying on kinship, mutual assistance, or selling small assets to finance their children's education. This habitus results in a disposition to persevere in structurally unequal

conditions, even though the higher education arena they enter is largely governed by urban logic that demands large economic capital and broader access. As explained by Reay (2020), rural habitus often brings distinctive survival skills and social solidarity, but at the same time places families at a disadvantage when dealing with urban-biased educational structures.

continues to reproduce inequality because the capital possessed by rural families is not always in line with the demands of higher education institutions. Swartz (2020) emphasizes that the mismatch between habitus and arena can create a continuous experience of marginalization, where poor families must struggle harder just to maintain a position that is considered normal by groups with greater economic capital.

Thus, the resilience of poor families in Donggo Subdistrict must be understood as a dialectical interaction between rural habitus, which is rich in values of solidarity and survival strategies, and the educational arena, which still demands high economic capital access. This analysis shows that structural challenges are not merely technical obstacles, but rather mechanisms of social reproduction that hinder educational mobility, so that policies that only emphasize financial aspects are not yet fully capable of overcoming the inequality experienced by poor families in rural areas.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the research and discussion, there are several key findings closely related to these objectives. First, families utilize economic strategies through subsistence farming, job diversification, and selling small assets as a means of surviving and financing education. Second, social support from extended families and local community networks becomes a source of collective strength that functions as a social buffer in the face of economic constraints. Third, the local cultural values of Maja Labo Dahu play an important role as symbolic capital that encourages families to continue to send their children to school, because education is seen as a moral responsibility as well as a determinant of social dignity. Fourth, although family resilience is built on the interaction between economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital, structural challenges continue to limit these efforts, particularly those related to remote geographical locations, high indirect costs, and



education assistance policies that are not yet fully adaptive to rural realities.

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