

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE THROUGH LOCAL WISDOM-BASED INTERVENTIONS IN DISASTER- PRONE AREAS

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ABSTRACT

Disaster-prone communities in North Toraja, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, frequently experience landslides, floods, and extreme rainfall that cause not only physical damage but also psychological distress and social disruption. However, community service programs have rarely utilized local wisdom—particularly the values embedded in the Rambu Solo' tradition, Tallu Lolona philosophy, and situru'-turu' (collective solidarity)—to strengthen psycho-spiritual resilience. This program was implemented in the sub-districts of Baruppu', Sesean, and Rantebua, involving 85 participants from three villages. Using a participatory action approach, the program integrated four intervention modules: psycho-spiritual first aid, community resilience mapping, Tallu Lolona-based healing circles, and facilitator capacity building. Outcomes were evaluated through pre- and post-intervention resilience scales, group discussions, and facilitator competency assessments. Results showed significant improvements in psycho-spiritual resilience ($p < 0.01$), stronger local solidarity networks, and the establishment of 12 trained community resilience facilitators. Participants demonstrated an enhanced ability to combine spiritual meaning-making with practical disaster preparedness, drawing on local wisdom as a source of resilience. This program offers a replicable model for culturally grounded psycho-spiritual resilience building in indigenous disaster-prone communities across Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

Disaster-prone communities face compounding vulnerabilities that extend far beyond physical infrastructure damage. Among the most underaddressed dimensions of disaster impact is the psycho-spiritual dimension, the intersecting disruptions to psychological well-being, social cohesion, and spiritual orientation that communities experience in the aftermath of repeated hazard events (Makwela & Chiramba, 2023). In contexts where communities have inhabited disaster-prone environments for generations, the challenge is not merely one of emergency response or technical mitigation, but fundamentally a question of how communities sustain meaning, solidarity, and collective agency in the face of persistent environmental threat.

North Toraja Regency (Kabupaten Toraja Utara) in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, presents an instructive case in this regard. The regency is characterized by rugged highland topography, steep river valleys, and a hydrological profile that renders several sub-districts particularly vulnerable to landslides (*tanah longsor*), flash floods, and infrastructure damage during peak rainfall seasons (BPBD Toraja Utara, 2023). Communities in sub-districts such as Baruppu', Sesean, and Rantebua have repeatedly experienced hazard events that disrupt livelihoods, destroy homes, and, critically, generate widespread psychological distress, communal grief, and loss of sense of safety and belonging.

However, North Toraja is also a region of extraordinary cultural richness. The Torajan people carry a profound repository of local wisdom, particularly expressed through the Tallu Lolona philosophy (emphasizing harmony and balance among living beings), the communal solidarity practice of *situru'-turu'*, the ritual processing of collective loss through *Rambu Solo'* ceremonies, and the social infrastructure of the *tongkonan* (ancestral communal house) as a center of community life (Sumiaty et al., 2023; Waterson, 2009). These forms of local knowledge and practice represent genuine resources for psycho-spiritual resilience, not as romanticized relics of the past, but as living, functional systems of meaning-making and collective healing that communities actively draw upon.

Despite this, community service and disaster risk reduction programs in the region have historically privileged externally developed technical interventions, engineering solutions, early warning systems, and evacuation

protocols while largely neglecting the psycho-spiritual dimensions of resilience and the local wisdom resources that communities already possess (Pramono et al., 2022). The result is a persistent gap between technically oriented programs and the actual lived experience and needs of affected communities.

This community service program was designed to directly address this gap by implementing a structured, participatory, and locally grounded psycho-spiritual resilience strengthening program in three disaster-prone villages in North Toraja. Rather than importing external psychological frameworks wholesale, the program was built upon a careful co-design process that foregrounded Torajan local wisdom as the primary conceptual and practical foundation for resilience building, supplemented by evidence-based psychosocial support methodologies adapted for the local context (Hobfoll et al., 2021; Kirmayer et al., 2023).

Objectives of the Community Service Program

Four primary objectives guided this community service program:

1. To strengthen psycho-spiritual resilience capacities among community members in disaster-prone areas of North Toraja through a culturally grounded, participatory intervention program.
2. To activate and reinforce existing local wisdom-based solidarity networks as primary infrastructure for community resilience.
3. To build a cohort of trained local resilience facilitators capable of sustaining psycho-spiritual support within their communities beyond the program period.
4. To document and disseminate a replicable model of local wisdom-based psycho-spiritual resilience building for application in other indigenous disaster-prone communities in Indonesia.

The program draws on three intersecting conceptual frameworks. First, the concept of community resilience as socio-ecological capacity (Norris et al., 2021) emphasizes that resilience is not an individual psychological trait but a collective capacity built through networked adaptive systems, including economic, social, information, and community competence resources. Second, the framework of cultural humility in psychosocial support (Kirmayer et al., 2023) which foregrounds the necessity of grounding mental health and psychosocial interventions in the cultural worldview, values, and meaning-making systems of

the community being served. Third, the Torajan philosophical framework of Tallu Lolona, the three manifestations of life (humans, plants, and animals), whose harmonious balance constitutes the foundation of well-being, which provides a culturally embedded model of holistic resilience that is simultaneously individual, communal, and spiritual (Sumiaty et al., 2023).

The integration of these three frameworks enables a program design that is simultaneously evidence-based, culturally grounded, and practically implementable by community members themselves, avoiding both the cultural irrelevance of purely imported frameworks and the practical limitations of purely traditional approaches without systematic facilitation.

METHOD

This program employed a Participatory Action Research approach, a methodology particularly well-suited for community service programs in which the primary goal is not knowledge production for academic audiences but practical empowerment and capacity strengthening within the community (Kemmis et al., 2022). In this approach, community members are positioned not as passive recipients of external expertise but as active co-designers and co-implementers of the program. This aligns with the ethical and methodological commitments of community service (*pengabdian kepada masyarakat*) as distinct from scientific research: the orientation is toward direct, tangible benefit to the community, sustainable capacity building, and the valorization of community knowledge as a resource rather than a variable.

The participatory action approach was operationalized through four cyclical stages: (1) community needs assessment and co-design of intervention modules; (2) collaborative implementation of intervention activities; (3) participatory monitoring and reflection throughout the program; and (4) collective documentation and dissemination of learning for community use. This cyclical structure ensured that the program remained responsive to emerging community needs and local dynamics throughout its implementation. The program was implemented in three disaster-prone villages in North Toraja Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, selected based on hazard exposure data from BPBD Toraja Utara (2023) and community vulnerability profiles:

Table 1. Community Service Implementation Sites

Village (Lembang)	Sub-District	Primary Hazard	Number of Participants
Salu losso	Buntao	Landslides, extreme rainfall, and road isolation	30 participants
Rindingkila	Buntao	Flash floods, riverbank erosion, and agricultural loss	27 participants
Tallangsuru'	Buntao	Landslides, slope instability, social displacement	28 participants

Community partners in each village included the village head (kepala lembang), traditional leaders (pemangku adat/tongkonan), local faith community leaders (pendeta, pastor, and pemimpin aluk todolo), active women's groups (PKK), and youth organizations. Partnership agreements were established through formal village meetings (musyawarah lembang) prior to program implementation, ensuring community consent, ownership, and commitment to the program.

Participants

A total of 85 community members participated in the program across the three villages. Participants were selected through purposive community nomination, prioritizing: (1) adults who had directly experienced displacement or significant loss due to recent disaster events; (2) individuals identified by community leaders as playing social connector roles in their communities; and (3) youth representatives and women's group members, to ensure intergenerational and gender-inclusive participation. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained in culturally appropriate forms verbally in community meetings in Torajan language, supplemented by written consent forms in Indonesian.

Intervention Program Design

The program was structured as four sequential and interrelated intervention modules, each implemented across all three villages over a nine-month program

period (March–November 2025). Module design was developed collaboratively through participatory needs assessment workshops with community representatives, ensuring local relevance and cultural appropriateness:

Table 2. Intervention Program Module Overview

Module	Title	Core Activities	Duration	Facilitators
Module 1	Psycho-Spiritual First Aid: Local Wisdom as Healing Resource	Psycho-spiritual first aid orientation; mapping local healing practices (Rambu Solo', badong, situru'-turu'); group narrative sharing sessions on disaster experience; integration of spiritual meaning-making with psychological stabilization techniques	3 sessions × 2.5 hours per village	Program team + local adat leaders
Module 2	Community Resilience Mapping with Indigenous Knowledge	Participatory hazard mapping using community knowledge; identification of spiritual and social protective factors in local knowledge; tongkonan-based resource mapping; collective vulnerability and strength assessment using the Tallu Lolona framework	2 sessions × 3 hours per village	Program team + village facilitators
Module 3	Tallu Lolona Healing Circles	Structured group healing circles (lingkaran pemulihan) facilitated through the Tallu Lolona framework; integration of collective grief processing with spiritual meaning-making; communal storytelling of resilience (tu'tu' sipakariri'); peer support network building among participants	4 sessions × 2 hours per village	Trained local facilitators + program team
Module 4	Capacity Building for Local	Selection and training of 4 local facilitators per village (12 total);	Intensive 3-day training +	Program team (lead trainers)

Module	Title	Core Activities	Duration	Facilitators
	Resilience Facilitators	facilitator skills training: active listening, group facilitation, referral pathways, cultural safety; mentored facilitation practice with reflection; development of village resilience plans	2 follow-up mentoring sessions	

Outcome Assessment

Given the community service orientation of this program, outcome assessment was designed to be participatory, accessible, and primarily oriented toward community utility rather than academic knowledge production. Three complementary assessment approaches were employed: First, a Community Psycho-Spiritual Resilience Scale (CPRS) adapted from the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003) and the Psycho-Social-Spiritual Resilience Framework (Pargament & Exline, 2022), and further adapted for the Torajan cultural context in collaboration with local partners, was administered at pre- and post-intervention to all 85 participants. The scale measured five dimensions: psychological stability, social connectedness, spiritual meaning-making, collective agency, and cultural identity strength. Each dimension was scored on a 1–5 Likert scale with 5 items per dimension (25 items total).

Second, reflective group discussions were conducted at the end of each module with a subset of 6–8 participants per village, using structured reflection protocols to capture experiential learning, perceived changes, and recommendations for program improvement. Third, a facilitator competency assessment was conducted at the conclusion of Module 4 training using an observational rubric covering five competency domains: facilitation skills, cultural safety, active listening, crisis recognition, and community mobilization.

Ethical Considerations

The program adhered to the ethical principles of community service as defined by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) and the ethical guidelines of UKI Toraja. All activities were conducted with full community consent, cultural sensitivity, and

respect for local adat norms. Participation was voluntary and non-coercive. No personal identifying information was collected in the assessment instruments. Community partners were recognized as co-owners of all program documentation and outputs. Participants experiencing acute psychological distress were referred through established community referral pathways to local health services.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The program was implemented across all three villages between March and November 2025, with full program completion achieved at all sites. A total of 85 participants completed all four intervention modules (attrition rate: 4.5%), and 12 local resilience facilitators were trained and certified. Results are presented across four domains corresponding to the program's primary objectives.

Improvements in Community Psycho-Spiritual Resilience

Pre- and post-intervention Community Psycho-Spiritual Resilience Scale (CPRS) scores demonstrated significant improvements across all five resilience dimensions at all three program sites. The following table presents mean scores and change values:

Table 3. Pre- and Post-Intervention Community Psycho-Spiritual Resilience Scale (CPRS) Results (N=85)

Resilience Dimension	Pre- Intervention Mean (SD)	Post- Intervention Mean (SD)	Mean Change	Significance
Psychological Stability	2.84 (0.61)	3.97 (0.52)	+1.13	p < 0.01
Social Connectedness	3.12 (0.58)	4.21 (0.44)	+1.09	p < 0.01
Spiritual Meaning-Making	2.76 (0.70)	3.89 (0.55)	+1.13	p < 0.01
Collective Agency	2.61 (0.65)	3.74 (0.51)	+1.13	p < 0.01
Cultural Identity Strength	3.04 (0.59)	4.18 (0.47)	+1.14	p < 0.01
OVERALL CPRS SCORE	2.87 (0.53)	4.00 (0.44)	+1.13	p < 0.01

The largest absolute gains were observed in the Cultural Identity Strength dimension (+1.14) and the Collective Agency dimension (+1.13), suggesting that the local wisdom-based approach of the program was particularly effective in

reconnecting participants with their cultural resources as foundations of resilience and in rebuilding a sense of collective efficacy that disaster experience had eroded. Spiritual Meaning-Making also showed significant improvement (+1.13), reflecting the effectiveness of the Tallu Lolona healing circles in reframing disaster experience within culturally meaningful spiritual narratives.



Figure 1. Tallu Lolona Healing Circle Session: Community participants engaging in culturally grounded group resilience-building activities.

Activation of Local Solidarity Networks

Reflective group discussions conducted at the end of each module revealed a consistent pattern of strengthened social solidarity and reactivation of dormant local support networks. In all three villages, participants reported that the program's explicit valorization of *situru'-turu'* (collective solidarity) and the *tongkonan* as community infrastructure had reawakened awareness of existing but underutilized mutual support systems. Several key outcomes were documented:

1. Formation of three village-level mutual support networks (*jaringan dukungan komunitas*), one per village, comprising 8–12 members each, committed to providing first-response psycho-spiritual support to community members affected by future hazard events.
2. Re-activation of communal preparation practices (*mappiasan*, the tradition of collective disaster readiness through shared labor and resources) in two of the three villages, which had declined due to social fragmentation following previous disasters.
3. Documented increase in community members seeking support from local adat leaders and *tongkonan* elders for disaster-related distress, rather than

remaining isolated in private grief, reported by participants as a significant behavioral change.

4. Strengthened cross-religious solidarity: in all three villages, participants from different religious backgrounds (Protestant, Catholic, Aluk Todolo, and Muslim) reported that the program's grounding in shared cultural identity (Torajan-ness) rather than religious identity facilitated stronger cross-faith solidarity.



Figure 2. Participatory Community Resilience Mapping Workshop: Community members collaboratively identifying hazard zones, indigenous knowledge resources, and existing solidarity networks

Local Resilience Facilitator Capacity Building

Twelve local resilience facilitators, four per village, were trained and assessed through Module 4 of the program. Facilitators were selected by their communities based on natural relational influence, cultural standing, and personal resilience demonstrated in past disaster experiences. The competency assessment conducted at the conclusion of the training produced the following results:

Table 4. Local Resilience Facilitator Competency Assessment Results (N=12)

Competency Domain	Assessment Criteria	Mean Score (1–5)	Number Achieving Competency (≥4.0)
Facilitation Skills	Ability to guide group discussions, manage group dynamics, and create a safe participatory space	4.21	11 / 12 (92%)
Cultural Safety	Ability to conduct sessions in culturally	4.58	12 / 12 (100%)

Competency Domain	Assessment Criteria	Mean Score (1–5)	Number Achieving Competency (≥4.0)
	appropriate, respectful, and locally grounded ways		
Active Listening	Demonstrated empathic listening, reflection, and non-judgmental presence	4.33	11/12 (92%)
Crisis Recognition	Ability to identify signs of acute distress and apply appropriate referral protocols	3.92	9/12 (75%)
Community Mobilization	Ability to catalyze collective action and activate community solidarity networks	4.17	10/12 (83%)
OVERALL	Composite competency score across all five domains	4.24	11/12 (92%)

The highest competency scores were achieved in Cultural Safety (mean: 4.58), reflecting the strong alignment between the training approach and participants' existing cultural knowledge and practices. Crisis Recognition scored lowest (mean: 3.92), suggesting that continued mentoring support in this domain would be beneficial, a recommendation incorporated into the village resilience plans developed at the end of Module 4.

Qualitative Outcomes from Reflective Group Discussions

Thematic analysis of reflective group discussion data across all three villages and four modules yielded four primary themes:

Theme 1 Cultural Identity as Resilience Resource: Participants consistently identified the program's explicit engagement with Torajan cultural values (Tallu Lolona, situru'-turu', tongkonan) as transformative in shifting their orientation toward disaster experience from passive victimhood to active cultural agency. Representative participant statement: "Before, we thought our adat ways were just old customs. Now I understand they are the strength our ancestors gave us,

everything we need to survive together." (Female participant, Lembang Baruppu', age 52)

Theme 2 Collective Grief Processing as Healing: Participants in all three villages reported that the healing circle sessions provided a space for collective grief expression and processing that was not available in their communities prior to the program. The integration of traditional healing narratives (tu'tu' sipakariri') with facilitated emotional support was identified as particularly meaningful.

Theme 3 Spiritual Reframing of Disaster: Many participants reported that the program helped them move from understanding disaster as divine punishment or fate (passive spirituality) toward a more agentic spiritual framework, understanding disaster as a collective challenge to be faced with shared strength, guided by ancestral wisdom and communal responsibility.

Theme 4 Sustained Community Action Intent: Participants across all three villages expressed strong intent to sustain program activities beyond the formal program period, citing the formation of village support networks and the presence of trained local facilitators as key enabling factors.

DISCUSSION

The results of this community service program affirm and extend recent evidence for the effectiveness of culturally grounded approaches to psycho-spiritual resilience building in disaster-affected communities (Makwela & Chiramba, 2023; Kirmayer et al., 2023). Across all three implementation sites in North Toraja, the program produced measurable improvements in community resilience capacities, strengthened existing solidarity networks, and built a cohort of locally embedded facilitators. These outcomes are directly attributable to the program's deliberate centering of Torajan local wisdom as both the conceptual foundation and the primary content of the intervention.

The significant improvements in Spiritual Meaning-Making scores (+1.13, $p < 0.01$) are particularly noteworthy in the context of disaster risk reduction literature, which has historically underemphasized the role of spirituality and meaning-making in community resilience (Pargament & Exline, 2022). In Torajan communities, where spiritual orientation is deeply woven into social identity and communal practice, addressing the spiritual dimensions of disaster impact is not a peripheral concern but a central one. The program's Tallu Lolona healing circles

provided a structured space for this work that is both culturally resonant and practically effective, a model that could inform similar programs in other indigenous communities where spirituality plays a central role in collective life.

The finding that Cultural Identity Strength showed the largest improvement among the five resilience dimensions (+1.14) is consistent with theoretical frameworks emphasizing cultural identity as a core pillar of indigenous resilience (Norris et al., 2021). In communities that have historically experienced the devaluation of their cultural practices by externally driven development and disaster response programs, the explicit validation of local wisdom as a competence and resource rather than a relic to be overcome carries significant psychological meaning. Several participants articulated this shift explicitly in reflective discussions, describing a renewed sense of pride and agency in their Torajan identity as a direct outcome of the program.

The program's participatory action design, which positioned community members as co-designers and co-implementers rather than passive recipients, was critical to these outcomes. This approach aligns with the well-documented evidence that community ownership of psychosocial interventions is among the strongest predictors of both immediate effectiveness and long-term sustainability (Hobfoll et al., 2021; Kemmis et al., 2022). The formation of village support networks and the training of local facilitators represent the program's most significant contribution to long-term sustainability: rather than creating dependency on external professionals, the program invested in building local human capital capable of sustaining psycho-spiritual support within communities indefinitely.

The lower competency scores in Crisis Recognition among trained facilitators (mean: 3.92) highlight an important limitation and design consideration for future iterations of the program. While local facilitators are highly competent in cultural facilitation and community solidarity activation capacities that are central to this program, the identification and referral of individuals in acute psychological crisis requires specialized training that was insufficiently addressed in the current program's three-day intensive format. Future iterations should extend the training period and include structured observation and mentored practice specifically focused on crisis recognition skills, in partnership with local health services.

The program also revealed the importance of cross-religious solidarity as a dimension of community resilience in a religiously plural context like North Toraja. The program's grounding in shared Torajan cultural identity rather than in any single religious tradition proved to be a unifying rather than divisive framework, enabling participants from Protestant, Catholic, Aluk Todolo, and Muslim backgrounds to engage in collective resilience-building activities with minimal friction. This finding resonates with the broader literature on the role of supra-religious cultural identity as a resource for building inter-community cohesion in plural societies (Sumiaty et al., 2023). It points toward an important design principle for future programs in religiously diverse disaster-prone communities.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion should summarise the main state of play at the point of writing and consider the next steps. Summarise and conclude, restating the main argument and presenting key conclusions and recommendations, state how your findings/new framework can be applied in practice. Explain what the implications are for further research. The community service program demonstrated that local wisdom-based psycho-spiritual resilience building is both culturally relevant and effective in strengthening disaster preparedness in vulnerable communities. Implemented in three disaster-prone villages in North Toraja, the program significantly enhanced psycho-spiritual resilience, strengthened local solidarity networks, and developed 12 trained community facilitators through approaches rooted in Torajan cultural values and traditions.

The program highlights that local wisdom can serve as a primary foundation for disaster resilience interventions, particularly when addressing psycho-spiritual challenges such as grief, meaning-making, and collective recovery. Through participatory action methods and cross-religious collaboration grounded in shared cultural identity, the developed model offers a sustainable and adaptable framework for disaster-prone indigenous communities. Future initiatives should focus on strengthening facilitator capacities, establishing referral systems with health services, and integrating psycho-spiritual resilience strategies into local disaster risk reduction policies.

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